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*Defences of Unitarianism for the Years 1788 & 1789.*

CONTAINING

L E T T E R S

T O

DR. H O R S L E Y,  
LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S,

T O

THE REV. MR. BARNARD,  
THE REV. DR. KNOWLES,

A N D

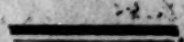
THE REV. MR. HAWKINS.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

AC. IMP. PETROP. R. PARIS. HOLM. TAURIN. ITAL. HARLEM.  
AUREL. MED. PARIS. CANTAB. AMERIC. ET PHILAD. SOCIUS.

*Facta minis quantum distent.*

OVID.



BIRMINGHAM,

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T H E  
P R E F A C E.

**H**AVING undertaken the defence of the Unitarian doctrine, or rather of this one position, that unitarianism was the faith of the primitive church; but not being willing to trouble the Public unnecessarily on the subject, I proposed to make one *annual reply* to such publications of my opponents as should make their appearance in the course of each year. This I did for the years 1786 and 1787; but nothing of any consequence having been produced in the year 1788, I had no occasion to write at all. The case has been something different this year. For though it will sufficiently appear that the advocates for the doctrine of the trinity have published nothing that is in the least degree formidable, enough has been done to give me an opportunity of shewing how little the cause of unitarianism has to fear from any thing that the

keenest eyes of its adversaries can discover to its prejudice.

If any man was ever interested in the support of any cause, it is the present Bishop of St. David's in that of trinitarianism; and yet I think there is hardly an example in the whole history of controversy, of any man having made so poor a figure as he has done in this. Sparing nothing that the force of language could supply to bear down his adversary (with what temper others will judge) I appeal to the impartial reader whether all his arguments have not only been totally without *weight*, but in general destitute even of *plausibility*.

Professing to prove my *incompetency in the subject*, he has given most abundant proofs of his own, and even of his deficiency in the learned languages. He has shrunk from the defence of most of the articles which he undertook to discuss, and has totally failed in the few that he did select, especially with respect to his church of orthodox Jewish christians at Jerusalem after the time of Adrian, and the want of veracity in Origen, who

who appeared by his writings to know of no such church. Even these mistakes were borrowed from Mosheim; so that, in all probability, he was, before the commencement of this controversy, intirely unacquainted with all those original writers with which he ought to have been particularly conversant.

This, indeed, is most evident both with respect to himself and his late ally Mr. Badcock, from the manner in which they took up my quotation from Athanasius. It is clear that the very idea of the apostles not chusing openly to teach the doctrine of the trinity, because it would give offence to their hearers, was absolutely new to them; though I have shewn it to have been the opinion of all the christian Fathers without exception, who mention the subject; so that my construction of this passage of Athanasius is abundantly confirmed by all the writers who either preceded or followed him; to say nothing of such men as Beausobre and Dr. Lardner having understood it exactly as I did, and of my antagonists being unable to produce the opinion



of any writer whatever in favour of theirs. To call my conduct in this business, as they scrupled not to do, a *fraud* and an *imposition*, discovers, I will not say, their own readiness to take such an unfair advantage themselves (for I hope that no man is capable of such complicated folly and wickedness, as in more cases than one, they have ascribed to me) but of such gross ignorance on the subject as is barely credible, with respect to men who voluntarily undertook to criticise another.

On this subject (with respect to which I am willing to appeal to the most prejudiced of my readers, and which, when it is well considered, will appear to be, in fact, decisive in favour of the Unitarian doctrine having been taught by the apostles) the Bishop of St. David's, in both his last publications, has been absolutely silent; and I am persuaded he will continue to be so.

Mr. Badcock charging me with a *wilful perversion* of the passage in Justin Martyr, in which he is also countenanced by Bishop Horsley, is another instance of a premature triumph



triumph of the same kind; discovering both their ignorance of the subject of this controversy, and of a very common idiom of the Greek language. This charge I will also venture to say the Bishop of St. David's will not repeat.

As to Dr. Knowles and Mr. Barnard, on whom I next animadvert in this publication, nothing but my promise to notice every thing that should be advanced with respect to the *argument from antiquity* could have induced me to reply to them. But though they are evidently deficient in a knowledge of christian antiquity, they appear to me to have given more attention to it than the Bishop of St. David's, and they are his superiors both in judgment, and in candour. They are capable, I am persuaded, of seeing their own deficiency, and of acknowledging it.

Mr. Hawkins I produce as an instance of the fatal fascination of splendid establishments on a mind truly sensible, and in other respects ingenuous. From the knowledge I have of him I will venture to say, that had it not been for this *foreign influence*

(which, however, he may not perceive, or suspect) he would no more have professed his belief of the thirty-nine articles of the church of England, after maturely abandoning the church of Rome, or have undertaken the defence of the doctrine of the trinity, than myself. But that a man of his good sense, and good disposition, and so well qualified as he is to write on any subject with which he is acquainted, should argue so weakly as he has done, both with respect to the *doctrine of the trinity*, and the subject of *subscription*, cannot, I am persuaded, be accounted for on any other principle.

I have not scrupled to consider Mr. Hawkins's *General Defence of the Principles of the Reformation*, in a *Letter to Mr. Berington* (with a copy of which he favoured me) in conjunction with his *Expostulatory Address to myself*; as a book printed, and circulated without any restriction, is sufficiently *published*. Besides, the reasons given in his Preface for not chusing a more extensive circulation, as they relate to the Catholics only, do not at all affect any of the passages on which I have animadverted. It is a work which

which must do the writer credit, in a variety of respects; and both Mr. Berington and myself wish that it was more generally known. It is for the interest of *truth*, for which we all profess to be advocates, that every question of consequence should be discussed in the freest and most public manner.

I have waited in vain for the re-appearance of three other of my antagonists, viz. Mr. Howes, Dr. Geddes, and the Dean of Canterbury. But as they have been sufficiently urged to produce every thing that they had to allege, and they have all had sufficient *time* for the purpose, I must conclude that *inclination* is wanting. Whether this want of inclination, has arisen from any consciousness of a want of *ability* to fulfil their engagements to the Public, must be left to the conjecture of our common readers. For with respect to *this* also they are silent.

I have also waited to no purpose for the appearance of some *Arian* learned in ecclesiastical history, to combat what I have advanced concerning the non-existence of their doctrine before the time of Arius; so that the field of controversy is now divided between



tween the two opposite parties of *Trinitarians* and *Unitarians*, neither of whom will allow that there is any just medium between their opinions.

I cannot help congratulating the friends of free inquiry on the attention that is given to the subject of this controversy, and the happy effects of this attention, indifferent, or distasteful, as it is to many. Though the superior orders of the clergy do not, for reasons that may easily be conceived, engage in the *public discussion*, it is frequently the subject of their charges to the clergy, of which that of the Bishop of Peterborough, noticed, page 168, is one instance. But another proof of a singularly curious nature appears in a Bill that was to have been brought into the house of commons in favour of the Catholics the last session of parliament. For among the *Provisos* in this bill, the seventh in number is the following, which I give verbatim from a printed copy put into my hands.

“PROVISO, THAT THE ACT SHALL NOT  
“EXTEND TO PERSONS WRITING AGAINST  
“THE TRINITY.”

This



This bill was not actually brought into parliament, but it had been settled with the minister, and the several articles of it had undergone much discussion. That this proviso was not inserted by the Catholics is very evident; nor could it have any meaning with respect to them; since they can no more be suspected of a disposition to write against the doctrine of the *trinity*, than against that of *transubstantiation*, both of them being equally fundamental articles of their creed. The real aspect of this clause, therefore, must be towards some persons who are known to disbelieve that doctrine, and who *may* be suspected of an intention to write against it; and the intimation it conveys is, that no favour is to be shewn by government to such persons. But what is sufficient to my purpose is, that it shews, in the strongest light, the extreme apprehensions of some persons in power (no doubt either bishops, or statesmen influenced by bishops) on the subject of this controversy.

As to the intimation, given in so awkward and round about a manner, that no favour will be shewn by the present government to those  
who,

who, like myself, write against the doctrine of the trinity, it is sufficient to inform them, of what they might have discovered themselves, that our silence is not to be procured by such means. If we be silenced at all, it must be by *argument*, not by such implied *threats*. Let ministers of state direct the bishops to defend their cause by *writing*, and let not bishops so evidently betray their want of confidence in argument, as to engage the ministry to oppose us by *laws*. Though both the methods will be ineffectual, there will be greater *propriety* in the former than in the latter.

This controversy having continued several years, and so much attention having been given to it, that there can be no doubt but that those who are most interested in the defence of the doctrine of the trinity must have produced all that they could allege in its favour, both the parties may now be supposed to be *come to an issue*; so that we may leave the decision to our proper judges, the learned Public. As to myself, I do not wish to tire my readers with a repetition of the same answers to the same arguments; and I am as little ambitious of  
*having*

*having the last word*, for the sake of its being so, as the Bishop of St. David's; and it must be something more *specious*, at least, than any thing that I have yet seen from him, or any other of my antagonists, that will convince me of the propriety of writing any more of these *Defences*. At a proper time I shall probably, in imitation of my antagonist, reprint all my *Traacts in this controversy*, and then I shall have an opportunity of noticing any thing that I may think deserving of it. My backwardness to write, when I have been properly called upon, has not yet been complained of.

I had proposed to conclude this controversy with a *serious Address to the Bench of Bishops, and to the Legislature of this Country*. But I do not know that it will be necessary; as nothing I could say, would be materially different from what I have already, and repeatedly, advanced on several other occasions. In this, however, I shall be determined by the circumstances in which I may hereafter find myself. I particularly recommend an attention to what I have briefly urged in the conclusion of my *History of the Corruptions*

*Corruptions of Christianity, my History of Early  
Opinions concerning Christ, and my Letter to  
Mr. Pitt.*

---

Εχθρον δὲ μοι ἐστὶν  
Αὐλὶς ἀριζήτως εἰρημμένα μυθολογεῖν.

HOMERI ODYS.

*Birmingham,  
January 1, 1790.*

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T H E  
C O N T E N T S.

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LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S.

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# LETTERS

TO

DR. HORSLEY,

LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S.

Hæc qui sacrilegis ausit convellere verbis,  
Schismaticus sit, et hæreticus; —

— et in mentem quicquid tibi splendida bilis  
Suggeret. Huc omnis tonitrus, huc fulgura lingue  
Congere, proque focus hic depugnetur et aris.

— Animi non mores exuit atros  
Vestis Hyperboreas superans candore pruinas.

BUCHANANI FRANCISCANUS.



# LETTERS

TO

Dr. H O R S L E Y,

LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S.

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## LETTER I.

*Of his Lordship's avowed Object to depreciate his  
Antagonist.*

MY LORD,

AFTER waiting, I believe, nearly twice *eighteen*  
*months*, the interval between your two pre-  
ceding publications in this controversy, I am happy  
to see you make your appearance in it once more.  
Your Lordship's greatest admirers have not wished  
for this event so ardently as myself, and my unitarian  
friends; because we consider your publications in  
this controversy as contributing in an eminent man-  
ner to the propagation of that great truth for which  
we think it glorious to contend, and which you  
oppose. The fact unquestionably is, that since the  
commencement of this controversy, the progress of  
unitarianism has been rapid, compared to what it

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ever

ever was before; and more within the church of England than among the Dissenters, though among them the number of converts has been considerable.

Truth will never fail to recommend, and establish itself, notwithstanding, and even by means of, *all* opposition; but *your Lordship's* mode of opposing it is so singularly efficacious in promoting it, that of all my antagonists I have always had the greatest satisfaction in replying to you. Besides, slow as your motions are (owing to the natural *indolence* of which you complain) your Lordship seems to be the most alert of all the members of your church who are engaged on the same side of the question with you. Mr. Howes, whose expedition was the greatest at one time, has, I fear, wholly declined the contest, and Dr. Horne's *great work*, so long promised, and so eagerly expected, I now almost despair of ever seeing. As to Dr. White, he seemed to promise, or rather *threaten*, much, but, alas! he has *performed* nothing at all. He may want the aid of my quondam admirer, Mr. Badcock.

On the whole, had I been permitted to chuse my own antagonist, by exposing of whose arguments, and manner of conducting the controversy, I might avail myself the most, I should certainly have made choice of your Lordship. After seeing your first set of *Letters* to me, I said to several of my friends, that if I could have dictated the whole of your performance myself, it should have been just what I found



I found it to be; your arguments were so extremely futile, and your manner of urging them giving me even more advantage than I wanted, or wished for.

The *principle* of your Lordship's attack upon me, and the *object* of it, avowed in your first publication, and repeated in the preface of this, is indeed most absurd. "It seemed," you say, p. 4, "that the most effectual preservative against the intended mischief would be to destroy the writer's credit, and the authority of his name; which the fame of certain lucky discoveries in the prosecution of physical experiments had set high in popular esteem, by proof of his incompetency in every branch of literature connected with his present subject.—For this declared purpose a review of the imperfections of his work in the first part, relating to our Lord's divinity, was made the subject of a charge delivered to the clergy of the Archdeaconry of St. Albans."

This curious plan of your Lordship's to destroy my reputation will probably bring to the minds of many of our readers the story of Cræsus. When he formed the design of making war upon Cyrus, he sent to consult the oracle of Apollo at Delphi; and the answer he received was, that, if he engaged in that war, he would overturn a great empire. He did so, and an empire was overturned; but that empire was *his own*. This, my Lord, would apply to your Lordship, if that could be said to be *overturned*, which was never *established*.

Had your Lordship reflected ever so little on the history of literature, you must have perceived that no such plan as this ever has succeeded, nor is it possible, in the nature of things, that it ever should. No work of *man*, especially one of an historical kind, and of any considerable extent, ever was free from imperfections; and therefore, upon your principle, the credit of no historical work whatever could stand; and yet there are many works of this kind in the highest reputation, with far more acknowledged imperfections than you have pretended to discover in mine; not to say that you have been completely foiled in all your attempts to discover any error, of the least consequence to my main argument. Would it destroy the credit of the late Dr. Johnson with respect to his knowledge of the English language, to point out faults in his *style*, of which many might be found? Was Newton no philosopher, because he made a mistake in one of his experiments; or no mathematician, because he is said to have committed an error in one of the demonstrations of his *Principia*?

No writer perhaps, except yourself, ever made greater mistakes in ecclesiastical history than Mr. Whiston; yet no person who is acquainted with them will say that *his* writings of this class are of no use. The real value of every work comes in time to be justly appreciated. Allowance is made for errors and imperfections, and due credit is given to every man, and to every production, for what is just, and will bear examination. This is all that I  
desire,

desire, and I am confident that I shall not be disappointed. As to all premature attempts to decry any particular work, or any particular man, such as your Lordship's, and those of your *allies*, as you call them, with respect to *me*, they always operate in favour of what is thus attempted to be cried down. Because no person will take the trouble to give an alarm, where he apprehends no danger.

After the contemptuous manner in which your Lordship affects, upon all occasions to treat me, both with respect to *knowledge* and *integrity*, you may easily perceive that it has no effect in inspiring others with the same sentiments. It is not even believed that you really entertain them yourself. You make me destitute of the very rudiments of the Latin and Greek languages, and altogether unacquainted with the writers of christian antiquity. You pretend that I purposely misquoted the common English translation of the Bible, in order to impose upon my readers. You now say, p. 488; in a peculiar solemn manner, that you would not take my evidence upon oath, and perpetually represent me as acting from the worst principles that can actuate a writer, or a man. But all persons for whose good opinion I have the least regard, really consider all this, if it be not *affectation*, as a kind of *insanity*, and we cannot help thinking that your mind is affected in the same manner as that of the knight of La Mancha, who mistook a wind-mill for a giant, and a flock of sheep for an army. Your Lordship's peculiarly haughty and indignant phraseology only

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serves



serves to amuse your readers by the singular curiosity of it.

The manner in which your Lordship affects to speak of my *History of early Opinions concerning Christ* cannot mortify any writer. I shall quote it for the entertainment of my readers. "The author is well aware that Dr. Priestley will charge him with one capital omission; that he hath taken no notice of any thing that may be contained, relating to the various points of this controversy, in Dr. Priestley's *History of early Opinions concerning Christ*; that large work in four volumes, the result of a whole two years study of the writers of antiquity, which, as it hath been published since Dr. Priestley's last Letters, may be supposed to contain better arguments, or at least his old arguments in a better form. The only apology to be made is a simple declaration of the truth. Not conceiving himself obliged to engage in the insipid task of reading so long a book, without better hope of information from it than his past experience of the writer's knowledge in the subject gives; Dr. Priestley's adversary is as ignorant of the contents of that work as he could have been had it never been published. It is reported, indeed, that the work, whatever may be its merits, has a very slow sale. Of consequence it has found but few readers. The antagonist of Dr. Priestley, were he better acquainted with its contents, would still disdain to do the office of midwife for this laborious birth. He would not, by an unnecessary and unseasonable  
"opposition



“opposition to neglected arguments, be the instrument of drawing four volumes, fraught, as the very title imports, with pernicious heretical theology, from the obscurity in which they may innocently rot in the printer’s warehouse.” Preface, p. 12, 13.

Now, my Lord, I am confident that my expectation of *your* producing any thing new and valuable on the subject of my history, is in reality less than yours concerning me; and yet had you, in the course of this controversy, produced a work of the same extent, on the same subject; more engaged as I am in business of various kinds than I can suppose so *indolent* a man as your Lordship to be, I should have had the curiosity at least to *look into* it. I therefore cannot help suspecting, with many others, that there is another reason for your not reading my work (if what you say of it be literally true) and a reason that is not at all to its disadvantage. Slow as the sale of so large a work, on such a subject, must be expected to be, it produces its effect, and will do so still more, the more it is considered; and of this, I doubt not, you yourself have some secret suspicion; and that if your Lordship thought that your *considering* and *answering* it would have done more than your *silence*, indolent as you are, you would have been roused to a little more exertion. But where there is no hope of success there can be no motive to action. At present your Lordship’s conduct may be compared to that of a general who should say to his antagonist, “Sir,

"I shall return the fire of your *small arms*; but as "to your *cannon*, I shall not trouble myself about "them." But you, my Lord, have so ill returned the fire of the *small arms*, that I do not wonder at your willingness to turn away from artillery of a large size.

As if you could not depreciate your antagonist too much, which, however, lessens the importance of your victory over him, you now speak of my philosophical discoveries (which on a former occasion you thought proper to mention with some respect) as merely *lucky* ones. On this subject I shall not make any defence; for *fortunate*, no doubt, I have been, as I have always readily confessed. But every philosopher knows, that a series of success of twenty years continuance could not be wholly *fortuitous*; and some praise is always due to *activity* in any useful pursuit.

If I were disposed to imitate your Lordship's contemptuous treatment of me (which, however, I flatter myself is only affected) I might inquire concerning *your* discoveries, the effect of *luck*, or otherwise, and I do not know where to look for information concerning them.

Of your *Commentary* on the works of Newton, undertaken, as you say, "*Societatis Regiæ Londinensis* "*adhortatione, et summo Optimatum atque litteratorum* "*totius Angliæ favore;*" from which the world was led to expect a work that would do credit not only  
to

to yourself, but to the nation which had produced the original, I know as little as you do of my *History of early Opinions concerning Christ*, and therefore I can say nothing of my own knowledge; but mathematicians of my acquaintance do not say that it does much credit to either, and that your Notes illustrate no real difficulty.

The depth of your Lordship's knowledge on the subject of *this controversy* has been sufficiently explored; and what you have published in the form of *Sermons*\*, though at the request of grave bishops, on other subjects of theology, are truly curiosities of the kind, and have contributed to the amusement of such of my friends as have had time to spare for the perusal of them. But as, I hope, the Public will not be influenced by your *mere opinion* concerning me, or my *writings*, so neither do I desire that they should be influenced by mine concerning you, or yours. Our *arguments* are before them, and I desire nothing more than a candid attention to them.

I am, &c.

\* One of these, viz. an Ordination Sermon, has been well animadverted upon by Mr. Wakefield, and another by the anonymous author of *A Letter to his Lordship, occasioned by his Sermon on the Principle of Vitality in man*.

LETTER



## LETTER II.

*Of the Charge of Want of Candour in Dr. Priestley.*

MY LORD,

**P**ROFESSING, as you somewhere do, to “strike  
“at your adversary without remorse” (and, as  
I may add, without judgment or discretion) and  
perhaps perceiving, by the impression which your  
writings have made upon others, that you had in-  
dulged your pride and resentment rather more than  
became a christian, or more than answered your  
purpose, you seemed willing, at least, to bring me  
in as a sharer in your guilt, and charged me, p. 294,  
with “dividing the clergy into two classes, the  
“*ignorant*, and the *insincere*.” In answer to this  
charge, I said that I could not pretend to recollect  
all that I had written, but that I was confident I  
never *meant* to say what you ascribed to me; that I  
had frequently declared the very contrary, in the  
very frankest manner; and that if I had advanced  
any thing which by a fair construction should amount  
to the charge, I retracted it, and asked pardon. In  
a generous mind this kind of reply would have ex-  
cited some generous sentiment; but it is to mistake  
the *soil* to expect any such produce from your  
Lordship.

After



After being frequently called upon to cite the passage on which your charge was founded, you now produce one in which I speak of *trinitarians* in general (but without any particular view to *the clergy*, many of whom are not trinitarians) as persons who, "if they were *ingenuous*, would rank with Socinians, "believing that there is no proper divinity in Christ "besides that of the Father, or else with Tritheists, "holding three equal and distinct Gods." You also quote two other passages, in one of which I speak of some persons as writing so weakly in defence of the doctrine of the Trinity, that it is barely possible that they should be in earnest; and another in which I suppose that some defenders of the established religion are insincere. But who will say that the whole of any class of men, defenders of an establishment or not, are sincere? Must complaisance require us to say that there are no bad men in the world, or that any particular class of men is free from them, when truth requires the contrary, and candour allows that there are many who are good?

If what I have said with respect to *ingenuousness* had been interpreted by the general strain of my writings, the controversial ones not excepted, it would have been ascribed to what I have more than once said of that *secret influence of motives*, of which the agent himself is not distinctly apprized, and what only a rigorous examination of himself, and a comparison of his conduct with that of other men, can enable him to discover. In this sense many worthy persons  
are

are far from being those ingenuous and impartial inquirers after truth that they take themselves to be, not perceiving the real source, or tendency, of their principles.

As this is a subject to which I wish that more attention were given, I shall take the liberty to make a pretty large quotation from what I advanced concerning it in the very first of my controversial tracts, viz. *Considerations on Differences of Opinion among Christians, addressed to Mr. Venn*, and I do it the rather, as that pamphlet has now been long out of print, and having fully answered its purpose, will hardly ever be reprinted. A small part of it was quoted before.

“Very few of the actions of men,” p. 41, “have, I believe, one simple cause. We are generally influenced by a variety of motives in whatever we do. It therefore behoves us the more carefully to distinguish the influences to which we are subject, and under which we really act.”

“When persons expressly avow the motives of their conduct, not to acquiesce in their declarations has the appearance of questioning their veracity; because it is taken for granted, that every man must know the principles of his own conduct. But the human mind is so complex a thing, that there is great room for self-deception, especially in cases where the passions and affections are strong, and  
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when they occasion similar emotions, as well as produce similar effects. In this case a by-stander may be a better judge than a man's self. A zeal for our opinions, and a zeal for our party, on the advancement of which our own personal reputation and influence depend, are necessarily connected, and reciprocally promote one another. For the same reason, a dislike of opinions has an affinity with the dislike of those who hold them, as men who are embarked in an interest opposite to ours, and whose credit and authority obstruct our own; and all the emotions of mind that are excited by the same object, how different soever they be originally, by frequent association mix together, so that the parts of that complex feeling which results from their union are no longer distinguishable. When two persons who have had frequent intercourse, have been a long time at variance, and the subjects of their contention have been numerous, can either of them analyze the sudden emotion they will feel in an unexpected meeting?

“ We often begin to act from one motive, but, as we proceed, we come insensibly within the influence of others; so that in some cases the *habit* shall continue, though the *original motive* should cease to have any influence at all; and yet it may be impossible to say in what part of this progress the influence of one motive ceased, and that of another began; the change of principle and character having been insensible, and altogether imperceptible.

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“ The application of this doctrine may be made both by those who are provoked at others for holding opinions which they think damnable, and by those who laugh at them for opinions which they think ridiculous. In many cases, I am satisfied, that the pure *love of truth* is on both sides absorbed in passions of a very different nature. I would overlook every thing in a man who meant nothing but to inform me of any thing that he thought me ignorant of; but they who have that pretence in their mouths only, when it is far from their hearts, though they may deceive themselves as well as others, are by no means intitled to so favourable a reception.

“ It behoves us, however, carefully to distinguish between this *latent insincerity*, under the influence of which men deceive themselves, and that *direct prevarication* with which those who are engaged in debate are too ready to charge one another, as if their adversaries *knowingly* opposed, or concealed, the truth. This last is a crime of so heinous a nature, that I should be very unwilling to impute it to any person whatever. For a man voluntarily to undertake the defence of what he thinks to be error, and knowingly to pervert the scriptures in order to make them favour his purpose, argues the heart to be so totally void of all principle of rectitude; it is such an insult upon the God of truth, and such a contempt of his judgments, that I think human nature could never be so depraved as to be capable of it, and that no situation in human life could supply



ply a sufficient temptation for such conduct. There are such well known instances of the force of prejudice, that I had rather ascribe any opinion, how absurd soever, in any man, how intelligent soever in other respects, to wrong judgment, than to a bad heart. I can hardly imagine any case in which the chance would not be in favour of the former.

“If these remarks be just, with what caution should we censure any person with respect to a point of mere speculation. How should I be affected at the day of judgment to be convinced of the integrity, and perhaps the right judgment also, of an adversary whom I should have treated in an illiberal and insulting manner.” P. 4, &c.

Whether you, my Lord, will allow the truth of these observations I cannot tell. You certainly have not acted upon them, either with respect to the excellent Origen, or myself. But I have not copied the above for the use of your Lordship; considering you to be a person to whom some of them are so far applicable, that I do not expect the least benefit from the fairest and justest representation of any thing connected with this controversy; and yet without thinking so ill of you, as you profess to do of me.

That your Lordship is in this state of mind, destitute of what I call *perfect ingenuousness*, is evident from the turn that you have given to a passage in my *Sermon* to which I had referred you, in answer to your charge of gross illiberality. I there speak in  
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the highest terms that I could of the *good understanding*, and the *sincerity*, both of many Catholics, and members of the church of England, even "those who are sensible of the corruptions and errors of the system in which they are entangled, and yet have not been able to break their chains." Of this you say, p. 295, "It is a long passage, in which he professes to hold the church of England in no less estimation than the church of Rome," which I might have done without thinking well of either of them. This I cannot call a fair and ingenuous conduct, because it gives your readers (many of whom, I believe, never read any thing of mine) a false idea of what I write. Besides, I said nothing directly about the two *churches* of England, or of Rome, but of the *members* of them; being openly hostile to the *systems*, but friendly to their *adherents*.

I am, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER III.

*Of the charge of borrowing from Zuicker.*

MY LORD,

THOUGH my rule in controversy is by no means your Lordships's above-mentioned, viz. "to strike without remorse at whatever in your adversary you find to be vulnerable, in order to destroy his character and credit;" I must, now that I am upon the subject of *latent dissingenuousness*, produce an instance which has much the appearance of it in your Lordship's conduct to me.

You charged me, p. 9, with having "produced few, if any, arguments, but what are found in the writings either of Zuicker, or Episcopus." From this it might naturally be concluded, that you had compared my arguments with those of those two writers, and had found them to be the same; which implies that you had seen, and perused, their works. I entertained no doubt of it myself; and taking it for granted that your Lordship had the work of Zuicker, or had access to it (and it being a book that I had never seen, and could not by any means procure) I desired a common friend to apply to you for it. Your answers, which were different at different times, convinced him that you had never seen the book at all. It has since been sent to

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me by a learned foreign correspondent, and I find Zuicker's views of the state of opinions in early times to be so different from mine, that I am confident, if you had ever *seen* his work, you had never *read* it. For if you had, you could never have asserted that I had borrowed from him at all.

Zuicker says, p. 16, that Justin Martyr, besides availing himself of his Platonic principles, derived his notion of a trinity from the spurious verses of Orpheus, which he supposes to have been written by some disciple of Simon Magus. He also makes Simon Magus the parent of the Praxeans, Patripassians, and Sabellians, p. 17. Now these opinions are fundamentally different from mine. I suppose Justin Martyr to have borrowed from nothing besides his Platonism; and he was so far from being friendly to Gnosticism, which was the offspring of the school of Simon Magus, that he wrote a treatise against it. And I consider the Praxeans, Patripassians, and Sabellians, as no other than philosophical Unitarians.

Except these opinions, there is nothing of much consequence in the work of Zuicker besides a proof, very much detailed for so small a treatise as his is, of the christian Fathers before the council of Nice not having believed the *equality* of the Son to the Father; and this, if I had read nothing of antiquity myself, I might have borrowed from Dr. Clarke, and twenty other writers, as well as Zuicker.

I submit



I submit it to the reader, therefore, whether your Lordship appears to have been perfectly ingenuous, in saying that I had borrowed from Zuicker, or whether you did not advance this charge at random, without any more knowledge of Zuicker's work than you got from Bishop Bull.

While I am on the subject of Zuicker, I shall observe that he had no doubt, p. 114, but that, in the passage of Jerom, the true sense of which has been debated between us, the writer meant to assert the identity of the *Ebionites* and *Nazarenes*, with respect to every thing of importance.

Zuicker also makes a good observation, p. 110, on the manner in which Austin introduces his account of the Ebionites, immediately after that of the Nazarenes, which is, *Ebionæi Christum etiam tantummodo hominem ducunt*; "The Ebionites also suppose Christ to be a mere man." As if it implied that the Nazarenes thought the same, though he had not expressly asserted as much in his account of them, the word *etiam* intimating as much. I am inclined to think that Austin *had* written this in the account of the Nazarenes, but that the clause is now lost. I cannot else account for the insertion of *etiam*, *also* in the next sentence.

I am, &c.

## LETTER IV.

*Of the damnatory Clause in the Athanasian Creed.*

MY LORD,

SO ready is your Lordship to charge me with the grossest ignorance, that you most egregiously expose your own, or, which is worse, your disposition to cavil, when you say, p. 287, "Dr. Priestley, I believe, is the only writer who ever confounded two things so totally distinct as an *anathema* and an *article of faith*, which he conceives the *damnatory clause* in the Athanasian creed to be."

The idle punctilio on which this remark of your Lordship's turns, relates to the acts of those councils in which it was the custom to make a *creed*, and then to annex *anathemas* to it. But this creed of Athanasius is no act of any council. You neither know who composed it, when it made its first appearance, or how it came into the public offices of the church. From the structure of it it is evidently a *mere creed*, containing nothing besides *propositions*, which were apprehended by the composer to be entitled to the firmest faith; and that this *damnatory clause* in question is one of those propositions, is evident both from the *form* and the *place* of it.

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It is not only introduced both at the beginning, and at the end of the creed, but, as if that was not sufficient, it has a place in the middle likewise; thus, "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." Thus this celebrated creed begins. About the middle we find the following clauses. "He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the trinity. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Lastly, it closes with this sentence, "This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved."

Do not these anathemas, or damnatory clauses, contain real *propositions*; and does not the person who pronounces them affirm the truth of those propositions? Can any person seriously say, that "they who do not believe all the articles of this creed shall without doubt perish everlastingly," without believing that they will perish everlastingly for their disbelief? Could any plainer terms have been contrived for the purpose? How, then, are these celebrated *damnatory clauses*, as your Lordship says, *no part of the creed*, when every person who professes to believe *the whole* of course receives these *parts*.

Had the word *anathema* only been used, it is possible that the force of it might not have been

attended to by the composer; it being too common to make use of words, especially in learned and foreign languages, without attending to their strict meaning; and your Lordship says it is so used in your Ecclesiastical Canons, when, it is applied to those who speak disrespectfully of the book of common prayer (though I would not answer, as your Lordship does, for the compilers of those canons *not* intending eternal damnation by it) but where the words *perish everlastingly* are expressly and repeatedly used, there can be no doubt with respect to the nature of the anathema. The damnatory clause so expressed is most unquestionably *an article of faith*, and certainly of a most serious and alarming kind. Indeed, my Lord, it is trifling with your readers, and an insult on common sense, to talk of any real difference between this *damnatory clause*, and the other parts of the Athanasian creed.

Whatever profession, therefore, your Lordship may inconsistently make of your charity, and, notwithstanding your idle parade about meeting me in heaven, when I believe you would be sorry to meet me any where, and are not very fond of meeting me in this controversy; unless my everlasting damnation be an article in your creed, you have subscribed the most solemn form of words that can be devised by man without meaning any thing at all by them; and why then may you not have subscribed every thing else with as little truth? Many, no doubt, *do* subscribe in this light and careless manner, which shews the dreadful effect of the *habit of subscribing*.



*subscribing.* It leads to the utter perversion of the plainest meaning of words, and opens a door to every kind of insincerity. By your Lordship's own confession you yourself no more believe what you have subscribed with respect to this creed, than you do the Koran.

Indeed, your Lordship's account of the trinity is a very different thing from the doctrine of this creed. For you suppose a manifest *superiority* in the Father, and yet in repeating this creed you can say of the three persons, that "none of them is afore or after the other, none is greater or lesser than another." Were you, my Lord, perfectly ingenuous, and were your mind perfectly unbiassed, you could not but see, and would certainly shudder at, the absurdities and contradictions in your declarations, and feel the same horror at subscribing, that I do.

If your Lordship defends these damnable clauses on the principle of *meaning nothing at all by them*, you vindicate the common cursing and swearing that we every day hear in our streets; where profane persons are continually sending their own souls, and the souls of other people, to hell, with as little meaning as your Lordship pretends to. If the phrase *perish everlastingly* does not mean perish everlastingly, your Lordship should have informed us what it does mean. It is certainly no *blessing*, but a *curse*, of some kind or other.

I do not wonder that men of enlightened and ingenuous minds, such as Archbishop Tillotson, should express a wish that they were *well rid* of this creed. But others, I fear (now, my Lord, mark my uncharitableness) would not be sorry if the language of it was still more harsh, that by the obligation to subscribe it there might be fewer competitors for those emoluments which may be obtained by subscription. For all your subscriptions do not exclude unbelievers in all religion, natural and revealed; persons who, on such terms as you offer, will subscribe any thing that is tendered to them. If you would have fewer of *these*, either in the church, or out of it, you must throw out every thing from your creeds and subscriptions which any sincere christian, or believer in the divine mission of Christ, cannot conscientiously assent to. Thus, however, you may say, Socinians might enter; and you may prefer the society of unbelievers to theirs; because, whether in, or out, of the church, they will give you much less trouble.

Indeed, my Lord, the opposers of all reformation will always have trouble from the zealous friends of it. We think it our duty to *cry aloud, and not spare*, when we see such abominations in the public worship of almighty God as are to be found in all the civil establishments of christianity in the world; corruptions borrowed from heathen polytheism, and which, in their nature and effects, are very similar to it.

I am, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER V.

*Of the Phrase, Coming in the Flesh.*

MY LORD,

YOUR Lordship maintained at large that the phrase *coming in the flesh*, applied by the apostle John to Christ, necessarily implies a *pre-existent state*. I think it a sufficient answer, that the Jews, by whom the phrase was used, had no such idea; since it is well known that they characterized the Messiah by the phrase *he that is to come*; when, at the same time, it is so well known that I shall not trouble myself to repeat the proof of it, that no Jews ever expected any other than a mere man for their Messiah. By *him that was to come* they meant the person who had been *promised* them, as to make his appearance in due time.

When, therefore, the Messiah *was come*, and a question arose concerning his *nature*, whether he had *real flesh*, or not, it was certainly not unnatural for a Jew, who believed that Christ, or *he that was to come*, was a *real man*, and had *real flesh*, to express his opinion by saying, that *Christ was come in the flesh*, and yet your Lordship says, p. 421, that “no reason can be devised why they (the Jews) should make choice of such uncouth mysterious words  
“ for



“for the enunciation of so simple a proposition, “which they might easily have stated in terms incapable of misconstruction.” Now, considering the phraseology to which the Jews had been long accustomed, in speaking of the Messiah, I appeal to our readers whether there be any thing peculiarly uncouth, mysterious, or unnatural in it.

I alledged a passage in the epistle of Polycarp, in which I thought, and still think, that the same phrase (evidently borrowed by him from the apostle John) indicates nothing more than *simple humanity*, in opposition to those Gnostics who maintained that Christ had not *real flesh*; because in the very same sentence, he gives two other characters, which evidently apply to the Gnostics only. I therefore concluded that the former clause was only another part of the description of the same class of men. Had he meant to describe the Gnostics, by enumerating their most distinguishing tenets, he could not well have expressed himself otherwise. This, however, I shall argue no farther, but submit to the judgment of our readers.

Your Lordship now alleges a passage from the epistle of Barnabas, which you say, p. 422, “is very decisive, in which the allusion to a prior condition of our Lord is manifest, and so necessary to the writers purpose, that if the phrase be understood without such allusion the whole sentence is nonsense.” It is as follows: “For if he had not come in the flesh, how should we mortals, seeing  
“him,



“ him, have been preserved, when they who behold  
 “ the sun, which is to perish [*and is the work of his*  
 “ *bands*] are unable to look directly against its  
 “ rays.” I shall continue the quotation a little  
 farther from Wake’s translation, p. 167, “ Where-  
 “ fore the Son of God came in the flesh for this  
 “ cause, that he might fill up the measure of their  
 “ iniquity, who have persecuted his prophets unto  
 “ death; and for the same reason also he suffered.  
 “ For God hath said of the stripes of his flesh, that  
 “ they were from *them*; and I will smite the shep-  
 “ herd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.  
 “ Thus he would suffer, because it behoved him to  
 “ suffer upon the cross.” &c.

Now, though the writer of this epistle might believe that Christ pre-existed, and made the world, it does not follow that he considered this phrase *coming in the flesh* as necessarily implying so much; and the general and obvious sense of the passage is complete without supposing any reference to a pre-existent state at all. For it is only this, that he could not have been the object of our senses, and could not have suffered upon the cross, as was foretold concerning him, if he had not had a *body* that was capable of being *seen*, and of *suffering*. Since the reasoning of this writer is so clear, without any allusion to a pre-existent state, it adds greatly to the probability of the clause [*which is the work of his bands*] which is omitted in the old latin translation, being an interpolation; and it is not doubted by any  
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men of learning that there are evident marks of interpolation in all the remains of the writings of this age.

Besides, if Christ be a compound being, consisting of *soul* and *body*, besides the *divinity*; and if *Christ* came from heaven, this ought to apply to *the whole* and not to any *part* of him only; and then his *flesh* and his *human soul*, must also have pre-existed, and have come down from heaven as well as the *divine logos*. I am satisfied, however, that both Polycarp, and the author of this epistle, in its original state, whoever he was, alluded to nothing more than the opinion of those Gnostics who held that Christ had no real body, and therefore that, though he was *come* according to the prophecies concerning him, he was not *come in the flesh*.

I am, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER VI.

*Of the meaning of the Word Idiota in Tertullian.*

MY LORD,

YOUR Lordship still maintains that the word *idiota*, which Tertullian applies to the *major pars credentium*, means *idiot* in English; and with great labour, no doubt, you have at length made out no less than *ten* significations of this word, and *one* of them, p. 427, is *stupid, dunce, booby, &c.* But for *this*, which is the only one to your Lordship's purpose, you produce no authority from any writer whatever; except some dictionary makers, whom the learned Bentley would have called, "very idiots in Greek and Latin" for their pains; the only synonyms that he allows being *illiteratus, indoctus, rudis*. Remarks on Free Thinking, p. 118. Your ninth, and harshest sense of the word, in any antient writer, is that in Cicero, where it is applied to *those who wanted taste in the fine arts*, and among them he ranks himself, *quemvis nostrum, &c.*

Acknowledging, as I have no objection to do, that by this word Tertullian meant to express something more opprobrious than by *simplices*, or even *imprudentes* (though the latter is not very evident)  
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it must be such an epithet as he thought applicable to *the greater part of christians*; and surely he would not chuse to call them *idiots*, or even *dunces* and *boobies*. Out of humour he was, no doubt, with those who could not relish his sublime doctrine of the trinity, and who thought it to be an infringement upon the great doctrine of the *sole monarchy of God the Father*, but he could not impute it to a natural defect in point of understanding, it being so very evident that the bulk of mankind are not deficient in that respect.

However, it is of no consequence by what epithet Tertullian, or any other writer, should chuse to denominate the *common people*; for they are the same in all ages, and therefore we are as good judges as he could be. The *major pars credentium*, or the great mass of christians, were no doubt *unlearned*, not having had the advantage of a liberal education; but they did not therefore *want understanding*, or had less natural good sense than the learned. And considering in what the *learning* of that age consisted, and how it tended, as I have shewn, to mislead men with respect to their ideas of the divine nature, it is infinitely more probable that the plain good sense of the common people would form a right judgment in this case than all the knowledge of the learned; to say nothing of the greater probability of the common people longer retaining the original doctrine concerning Christ. For, whether your Lordship like the observation or not, it is  
universally



universally true, that old opinions are to be looked for among the common people, rather than among the learned and speculative.

You say, p. 432, that the natural sense of Tertullian's words is that, "this scruple," viz. their objection to the doctrine of the trinity, "was incident chiefly to persons of that description; not that it was to be found in the whole body of the common people. He insinuates that persons of that weak character only, were liable to that alarm." But certainly in Tertullian's idea this objection to the doctrine of the trinity, or rather this *dread* of it, was common to *all* those whom he calls *simplices*, *imprudentes*, and *idiotæ*, for he makes no exception; and of such he says, the greater part of christians consisted. Consequently, by his own reluctant confession, the majority of the christians of his age, whatever he might chuse to call them, were unitarians, and dreaded (*expavescebant*) the doctrine of the trinity, even in the qualified sense in which it was then maintained; when there was no idea of the proper *equality of the Son to the Father*, and when it was thought that *there was a time when he did not exist*. For such unquestionably was the opinion of Tertullian himself.

Thus, my Lord, your elaborate defence of your use of the word *idiotæ*, is mere lost labour, and renders your ignorance still more conspicuous than it was, by the addition of incorrigible obstinacy in error.

I am, &c.

## LETTER VII.

*Of Heretics according to Irenæus.*

MY LORD,

**A**NOTHER question between us is, who were the *heretics* of early times, and I have shewn, by a series of quotations from the earliest writers to those of a pretty late date, considering the nature of the question, that the *Gnostics* only were considered in that light, as holding assemblies separate from those who called themselves the *catholic church*. I had said that Irenæus, though he wrote a large treatise against heretics, and expressed great dislike of the *Ebionites*, had not called them *heretics*. In one passage I said I had once been of opinion that he *had* applied that epithet to them; but that on reconsidering it I was of a different opinion, and I am so still, notwithstanding what your Lordship has advanced in reply to me.

I farther added, that “if there was any other “passage in which Irenæus called the Ebionites “heretics, I had overlooked it.” Such a passage, however, your Lordship now produces, p. 455, for among other heretics he there enumerates the Ebionites. But this is of no consequence to my argument; and if I had attended to the passage I should

should have produced it myself, as I have never failed to do with respect to every thing else, that appeared to me to be of any consequence, whether it made for me, or against me. But there is an evident reason why the Ebionites were pretty soon considered as heretics, and a reason which did not affect the Unitarians among the Gentiles. For the Jewish christians, on account of their using a different language, held *separate assemblies* from those who used the Greek tongue; and besides Jerom expressly says they were deemed heretics *ONLY on the account of their attachment to the institutions of Moses.*

I had farther said, that it was contrary to Irenæus's *definition of heresy* to consider the Ebionites as heretics. To this your Lordship says, in your usual strain of politeness, when you think you have any advantage, p. 456, "he will confer a mighty obligation upon the learned world, if he would be pleased to give information in what part of the whole work of Irenæus that definition may be found."

I answer, that a strictly *logical definition of heresy* may not perhaps be found in Irenæus, for such definitions are not common in ancient writers. But he repeatedly says, that concerning *all heretics*, which does not in the least apply to the Ebionites, which is fully equivalent to what I said; and since you have not read my *History of Early Opinions concerning Christ*, and probably never will do it, I shall take the liberty to copy a few passages to this purpose from it, vol. I. p. 275, &c.

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Irenæus



Irenæus considered Simon Magus as a person from whom all heretics sprung. But his doctrines were those of the Gnostics, and so opposite to those of the Unitarians, that they were never considered as having the same source. Of *all heretics*, he says, that "they drew men off from him who made and governs the world, as if they had something higher and greater to shew than he who made the heavens and the earth, and all things therein. They all agree," he says, "in the same blasphemy against the Maker of all things." "The doctrine of Valentinus comprehends all heresies, so that in overturning his system all heresy is overturned. They also blaspheme in supposing the Maker of all things to be an evil being, and they blaspheme our Lord by dividing Jesus from the Christ. There is a connexion," he says, "between all heresies, except that Tatian advanced something that was new." He speaks of all heretics as "having quitted the church," and as "taxing the holy presbyters with ignorance, not considering how much better is an ignorant person who is religious (*idiotia religiosus*) than a blasphemous and impious sophist." He likewise says, that "all the heretics were much later than the bishops to whom the apostles committed the churches."

It would be losing my own time, and that of my readers, to shew that none of these characters, which this writer applies to *all heretics*, belonged to the Ebionites, and therefore that to have been consistent with



with himself, Irenæus ought not to have considered the Ebionites as heretics.

As to your Lordship's curious attempt to find an agreement between the Gnostics and the Ebionites, I shall leave it without any remark to the judgment of our readers. In some respects, no doubt, the Unitarians and Trinitarians are agreed; but it does not therefore follow that they would both be referred to the same class of christians. There were, as I have shewn at large, Jewish Gnostics, and being Jews, they might be called Ebionites; but they all believed that the supreme God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, both made the world, and gave the law by Moses, which are the very reverse of the doctrines that Irenæus ascribes to *all* heretics.

I am, &c.

## LETTER VIII.

*Of the Origin of the Son from the Father's Contemplation of his own Perfections.*

MY LORD,

**T**HIS letter I shall devote to that most curious subject, *the origin of the Son from the Father's contemplation of his own perfections*, which your Lordship has thought proper once more to bring before the public; but which I should have thought a judicious friend would have advised you to keep as far as possible out of sight. You express yourself, however, with more diffidence than before, which is a thing unusual with your Lordship.

You justly say, p. 458, "In a subject so far  
 " above the comprehension of the human mind as  
 " the doctrine of the trinity must be confessed to  
 " be, in all its branches, extreme caution should be  
 " used to keep the doctrine itself, as it is delivered  
 " in God's word, distinct from every thing that has  
 " been devised by man, or that may even occur to  
 " a man's own thoughts, to illustrate or explain its  
 " difficulties. Every one who has ever thought for  
 " any length of time upon the subject cannot but  
 " fall insensibly, and involuntarily, upon some way or  
 " other of representing the thing to his own mind.  
 " In

“ In this manner every one who meddles at all with  
“ the subject will be apt to form a solution for  
“ himself, of what seemed to him the principal  
“ difficulties. But since it must be confessed that  
“ the human mind in these inquiries is groping in  
“ the dark, every step that she ventures to advance  
“ beyond the point to which the clear light of  
“ revelation reaches, the probability is that all these  
“ private solutions are, in different ways, and in  
“ different degrees, but all in some way, and in some  
“ degree, erroneous; and it will rarely happen that  
“ the solution invented by one man will suit the  
“ conceptions of another. It were therefore to be  
“ wished that, in treating this mysterious subject,  
“ men would not, in their zeal to illustrate what  
“ after their utmost efforts must remain in some  
“ parts incomprehensible, be too forward to mix  
“ their private opinions with the public doctrine.  
“ Nay it should be a point of conscience,” you add,  
“ with every writer to keep any particular opinions  
“ he may have formed as much as possible out of  
“ sight, that divine truth may not be debased with  
“ a mixture of the alloy of human error,” &c.

This conduct, my Lord, would have been good policy, but in the pride of your understanding you were not able to observe it, and in your imprudent forwardness to illustrate what is in itself so palpably absurd as to be incapable of illustration (as much as it is of *proof*) your Lordship produced a sentiment so supereminently absurd, as to have contributed not a little to the entertainment of our

common readers; and what your Lordship has now added on the subject will, if I be not mistaken, considerably add to their amusement.

Your Lordship's original observation, to which you now, by abridging it, give a different turn, was as follows: Tracts, p. 55, "The sense," viz. of a passage in Athenagoras, "is, that the personal  
 "subsistence of a divine logos is implied in the  
 "very idea of a God; and the argument rests on a  
 "principle which was common to all the Platonic  
 "fathers, and seems to be founded in scripture, that  
 "the existence of the Son flows necessarily from the  
 "divine intellect exerted on itself, from the Father's  
 "contemplation of his own perfections. But as  
 "the Father ever was, his perfections have ever  
 "been, and his intellect has ever been active. But  
 "perfections which have ever been the ever-active  
 "intellect must ever have contemplated; and the  
 "contemplation which has ever been must ever  
 "have been accompanied with its just effect, the  
 "personal existence of the Son."

Such, my Lord, was the original *text*, which is now shrunk up into a very small compass, viz. that "the existence of the Son," p. 460, "flows  
 "necessarily from the divine intellect exerted on  
 "itself," and which not being *dilated*, as it was so curiously done in your Lordship's first publication, might have escaped my notice. Accompanied with your former *illustration* it struck me, and I believe most of your readers who gave any attention to it,



as something uncommonly ridiculous; and I maintained that it was also most notoriously *false in point of fact*, and betrayed an utter unacquaintedness with every thing of primitive antiquity on the subject. And this opinion, notwithstanding your Lordship's elaborate vindication of yourself, I still maintain. For according to the most obvious construction of the passage, the production of the Son was absolutely *necessary*, and did not at all depend upon the *will* of the Father; whereas according to all the Platonic Fathers before the Council of Nice, the generation of the Son was the *voluntary act* of the Father, and an act not exerted from all eternity (which if it had been *necessary* it could not but have been) but which took place *in time*, viz. just before the creation of the world, and for the purpose of that creation. In the work which your Lordship has not read, and which it is therefore more necessary for me to quote, is the following evidence of this.

Tatian represents the Father as having been *alone* before the creation of the world, that *at his will* the Logos came out of him. Theophilus says, that "according to John, God was at first alone, and "the Logos in him." Clemens Alexandrinus says, that "the Father was God before he was a Creator, "but, being good, he *chose* to be a Creator and a "Father; and he speaks of the Son as deriving his "origin from the *will* of the Father." "Do you "inquire about the generation of the Logos, says Hippolytus, "God the Father generated whom he "pleased, and as he pleased."

Tertullian expressly says, that "God was not always a father, or a judge; since he could not be a father before he had a son, nor a judge before there was sin; and there was a time when both sin and the son, which made God to be a judge and a father, were not." *Ad Hermogenem*, cap. 3. *Opera*, p. 234.

Novatian (or rather Novatus) says, nothing was before Christ but the Father, and that the Son was generated from God *when he chose*. "God," says Lactantius, "before he undertook the construction of this world generated an incorruptible spirit, which he called his Son." Eusebius, speaking of God's intending to form the material world, says, "he thought of making one to govern and direct the whole." He also says, "light is emitted from the sun necessarily, but the Son became the image of the Father from his knowledge and intention; and that *when he pleased*, he became the Father of a Son." "We believe," says Athanasius, "that God generated the Son spontaneously, and *voluntarily*." *History of early Opinions concerning Christ*, vol. II. p. 130, &c.

Were not these writers, my Lord, *Platonic fathers*, according to *all* of whom your Lordship says, that the generation of the Son was *necessary*. If these be not Platonic fathers, please to inform us who were? And yet you have the assurance to say, p. 464, "To me it is matter of astonishment that any one can read some of the passages which

" Dr.

“ Dr. Priestley himself has produced from Athenagoras, Tatian, Tertullian, and others, and not perceive that this notion was common to *all* those writers, and is the principle upon which all they have said upon the subject rests.”

In a later period, when the idea of the *equality* of the Son to the Father was advanced, the orthodox divines were obliged to give up their opinion of the *voluntary* generation of the Son, and to make his existence as *necessary* as that of the Father himself; but still their idea was not the same with your Lordship's, viz. that it was the necessary result of the Father *contemplating*, that is *viewing* himself. This is a peculiar *mode* of necessary origination, for which your Lordship finds no colour till you come to a much later period than that of the Platonic fathers; and after all it is no more than *a colour* that you find in the writings of any theologians for this curious and singular notion. Basil, you find, says, that *the Son came forth from intellect*, as no doubt he must if he came from *the Deity*, who is generally represented as *pure intellect*; but he does not say that this *coming forth* was a *necessary* consequence of the Father's *contemplating himself*.

From the Fathers you pass to the *Schoolmen*; but from none of them do you produce any quotation at all; nor does your Lordship's general account of their opinions, even in your own words, imply, that any of them had that precise idea which you have  
given

given out. For generation *by intellect*, or *by will*, is not sufficiently definite for your purpose.

Coming down lower, in your laborious search after nonsense, than the Council of Trent, you do, I acknowledge, find a similarity to your opinion in words. For in the *Catechismus ad Parochos*, p. 467, you find mention made of “a wonderful fecundity of God the Father, that by contemplating, and exerting his intelligence upon himself, he begets a Son, the exact counterpart, and equal of himself.” But here the word *contemplating* means only *thinking*, and not a mere *viewing of himself*, which is the idea that your Lordship’s language suggests; nor is this exerting of *intelligence upon itself*, by which the Son was begotten, said, or intimated to be, *necessary*, which your Lordship makes it to have been. The other passages which you quote are all of them from writers subsequent to the Council of Trent (which I own I was not much acquainted with, and which it is probable your Lordship knew as little of as myself, till you found it necessary to look out for some authority or other, modern if not ancient, for your curious imagination) express no more than *this*; and therefore none of them are at all to your purpose.

But supposing that these writers should have had the same idea with your Lordship, my ignorance of this circumstance would not, as you say, p. 464, “evince my ignorance of the religious opinions of  
“every



"every age, and how much the oldest things are "novelties to me;" but only my ignorance of such things as I imagine our readers will think to be hardly worth knowing. In all christian *antiquity*, to which my inquiries have been chiefly confined, no such idea as yours occurs. Your Lordship is obliged to go even beyond the age of the schoolmen for something only *like* it; so that I was abundantly justified in saying that, on reading your account "I fancied myself got back to the darkest "of the dark ages, or at least that I was reading "Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, or Duns "Scotus."

You do very well, my Lord, to forbear quoting any of those *texts of scripture* (though you say, p. 461, "many phrases of holy writ seem to you to allude "to it)" on which you are of opinion that this "curious notion *seems to be founded*." You might well suppose that you had already afforded *the prophane* too much matter for their diversion.

I also cannot help commending your prudence in saying, p. 476, "about the *truth* of the opinion, "I have declared that I will not dispute, and I "shall keep my word." It is much better to acknowledge an error *tacitly*, by giving up the defence of it where it is most necessary, than not to acknowledge it at all.

As your Lordship, however, has thought proper to bring this curious subject once more before the public,

public, I wish you had not contented yourself with endeavouring to find *authorities* for your opinion among authors which, if they could be found, would only be treated with ridicule, but have answered my other queries necessarily arising from it. A *reductio ad absurdum* is always deemed a sufficient refutation of any proposition. Now, among other things, I observed, that, if the Father's contemplation of his perfections necessarily produced a Son, this Son, being in all respects *equal to the Father*, and consequently having the same perfections to contemplate, and of course the same power of contemplation, must have produced another Son.

That you may the more distinctly perceive the force of this reasoning, I shall repeat concerning the *Son*, what you say of the *Father*; since you must allow that, *mutatis mutandis*, it must be equally just in one case as the other. "As the Son ever was, "his perfections have ever been; and his intellect "has been ever active. But perfections which "have ever been the ever active intellect must ever "have contemplated; and the contemplation which "has ever been must ever have been accompanied "with its just effect, the personal existence of a Son," which in this case will be a *grandson*.

The same reasoning will equally apply to the *Holy Spirit*; so that this divine person also, by the contemplation of his perfections must produce a son; and the same being true of all the sons, and grandsons, and great grandsons, &c. &c. &c. of these  
divine

divine persons (to say nothing of the necessary repetition of the same process with respect to them all) we have here a source of multiplication of divine persons *ad infinitum*; and what expedient can you apply to stop the progress of this wonderful *fecundity*, when there is danger of its exceeding its just bounds, your Lordship does not say. This, you will say, is burlesquing a grave subject. But, my Lord, it is yourself who have burlesqued it, and not I; and your Lordship alone is answerable for all the ridicule which your officious explanation has brought upon the doctrine, and upon yourself. If a man will say ridiculous things, he must be content to be the subject of ridicule. This I hope will be a caution to you in future, especially if you should feel yourself tempted to enter into any similar explanation of the *miraculous conception*.

Your Lordship had done much better to have kept to the original idea of the Platonic fathers, which was, not that the generation of the Son was the necessary, or voluntary, effect of any exertion of the Father's intellect, but that he was that *intellect*, or his *reason itself*. This appears to have been very nearly the idea of Bishop Sherlock, who says, that *the Son is the Father's reflex knowledge*; so that he understood the doctrine of the Platonic fathers much better than your Lordship. To this, however, one of his answerers in the *Unitarian Tracts*, vol. I. makes a very pertinent reply, similar to what I have just observed with respect to your Lordship's peculiar idea. "But the Son," says he, "being an infinite  
" and

“ and most perfect mind, is undoubtedly able to  
 “ reflect upon his own wisdom and knowledge; and  
 “ thus, as well as the Father, to beget a son; and this  
 “ second son in the trinity may, by the same means  
 “ and reason, beget another, and so onwards to  
 “ infinity. Thus according to this maxim, that what  
 “ are *faculties* in us are *persons* in God, there may  
 “ be, nay there must be, an infinite number of  
 “ persons in God. Apage!” *A Defence of the brief  
 History of the Unitarians against Dr. Sherlock's Answer  
 in his Vindication of the holy Trinity*, p. 28.

If I could suppose that your Lordship had ever looked into such books as these *Unitarian Tracts*, which have been published about a century, I could almost think that you had borrowed your idea from this anonymous answerer of Bishop Sherlock, who puts that construction upon his words, though they do not appear to me necessarily to imply what he deduces from them. For he supposes, with your Lordship, that the Son was produced by a *reflection upon the Father's knowledge*; whereas the Bishop makes him to be his *reflex knowledge* itself.

As to what your Lordship says of my *rash defiance*, which I have again the rashness to repeat, let our readers now judge. “ Dr. Priestley's rash defiance, “ p. 476, I may place among the specimens with “ which his History, and his Letters to me abound, “ of his incompetency in this subject, and of the “ effrontery of that incurable ignorance, which is “ ignorant even of its own want of knowledge.”

Many



Many persons will be of opinion that the *ignorance* (which your Lordship describes as itself *ignorant*) and also, that the *effrontery* (or *boldness*, which I suppose is itself *bold*) of which you here speak are, indeed, to their great surprize, to be found *somewhere*; but it will now be evident that they are not with *me*.

As this letter relates to a subject which many persons will not be able to *contemplate* with much gravity, I shall subjoin to it another article of a similar nature.

This controversy affords many instances of different persons being very differently affected by the same representation of things. Your Lordship says in your Note, p. 49, That God saying, *Let us make man*, Gen. i. 26. "describes a *consultation* between the "persons of the Godhead," and that "this is shewn "with great brevity, but with the highest degree of "evidence, and perspicuity, by Dr. Kennicott." Now, my Lord, had any person besides a Trinitarian suggested the idea of any thing that could be called a *consultation*, being held by the three persons in the Godhead, you would have said that it was *blasphemous*; since a consultation among different persons implies a previous *ignorance* of each other's sentiments, and something like *debate*; and consequently *difference of opinion*; and that in a consultation among *three* persons, if a proposal did not please any one of them, the other two would carry it by a majority. But the idea being suggested by yourselves you see  
nothing

nothing absurd in what is most obviously and most ridiculously so.

I would farther observe, that a consultation among the persons of the trinity clearly supposes the same *distinction* in *these persons* as that which subsists in any *three men*, each of whom has a train of thinking peculiar to himself, and independent of those trains that are going on in the minds of the other two; so that whatever they be *called*, they must in reality be *three Gods*. If, however, such a consultation may, "with the highest degree of *evidence*, "and even *perspicuity*," as your Lordship says, be inferred from this phraseology of Moses, is it not a little extraordinary that no Jew ever made the same inference from the passage?

I am, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER IX.

*Of the Church of orthodox Jewish Christians at Jerusalem, and of the Veracity of Origen.*

MY LORD,

TO make it appear at all probable that the doctrine of the trinity was taught by the apostles, your Lordship has very justly thought it necessary to find it among the Jewish converts, who cannot be supposed to have altogether abandoned the faith which they received from them. That many of them were so far from receiving this doctrine, that they held it in abhorrence, you cannot deny; but your Lordship maintains that, notwithstanding this, there was a church of Trinitarian Jews at Jerusalem even subsequent to the time of Adrian; and because what Origen, who must have known the fact, says concerning the Jewish Christians is inconsistent with such a supposition, you scruple not to call him a wilful liar. To silence "an adversary," you say (Letters, p. 260) "he had recourse to the wilful" "and deliberate allegation of a notorious falsehood\*."

\* As this is nothing less than the *lie direct*, it may be well for his Lordship of St. David's that Origen is not now living, and actuated by the modern notions of *honour*.

E

Origen

Origen evidently makes all the Jewish christians to have been *Ebionites*, and the Ebionites to have been of *two kinds*, viz. those who held the doctrine of the miraculous conception, and those who denied it; but he says that neither of them admitted the divinity of Christ. So positive a testimony as this, from so respectable a character (the most so, I will venture to say, that his age, or that any age, can boast) one would have thought, could not have failed to have some weight with persons who had not intirely bid farewell to shame, and who were not determined to support an hypothesis *at any rate*. It is not only the testimony of a man of the greatest purity of character in all respects, but delivered in the face of all the world, who could not but have known it to be a falshood, if it had been one; and therefore could not have had any other effect than to expose himself. It is, in fact, to suppose that a man of the greatest integrity in the world would tell a lie in circumstances in which the greatest liar would have told the truth.

This account which Origen has given of the Ebionites is also given by him as an exprefs contradiction to what his adversary had said with respect to a *known fact*, his ignorance of which he is exposing. Would he, then, have knowingly exposed himself to the charge of purposely misrepresenting the very thing which he was there charging his enemy with misrepresenting? Moreover, this treatise of Origen was written by him *late in life*, and is the most elaborate of all his compositions; so that there  
can



can be no doubt of its having been written with the greatest circumspection. It is a defence of christianity, then persecuted, against the heathens who were its persecutors. In these circumstances, would not a heathen philosopher have rejoiced to expose such a writer as Origen, and the cause in which he was engaged; glad as the heathens always were to load the christians with unmerited calumnies of the most atrocious kind?

If ever any man had a motive to keep himself within the bounds of truth it was Origen in this particular case, a man who was considered as at the head of the christians, and of whom the greatest men which that and the following age produced, such as Dionysius of Alexandria, Firmilian of Cappadocia, and Gregory of Neocæsarea, were the greatest admirers. Would such men as these have been so wonderfully attached, as they are known to have been, to Origen, if he had been a *wilful liar*?

Can it then be supposed that such a man as this, in the circumstances in which he wrote, would have asserted concerning the Jewish christians in general, that they were all Unitarians, though some of them were believers in the miraculous conception, if it had been notorious (as, if it had been true, it must have been) that there was then existing a whole church of Trinitarian Jewish christians in Judea, the country in which he resided a great part of his time, and in which he probably wrote this very treatise? Such a church, especially in Jerusalem,

could not but have been highly respected, as the common mother of all christian churches. Could he also have said of these Jewish christians, that they adhered to the peculiar laws of their ancestors, when it could not but have been equally notorious that they had deserted them?

If we look into history, we shall find no mention of any such church of Trinitarian Jewish christians who had abandoned the institutions of Moses, or of the bishops of it, though many transactions are recorded in which they could not but have been concerned, in common with other churches, and their bishops. And if these Jewish christians formed a church, it must have been separate from the Greek church, and have had separate bishops; for the congregation could not have understood the Greek language.

This circumstance your Lordship intirely overlooked when you asserted, Letters, p. 59, that these Hebrew christians were of the "church of Jerusalem, when that church was under the government of "bishops of the uncircumcision." What connexion could they have with a church, the public service of which they could not have understood? Worshipping in an unknown tongue was hardly introduced at so early a period. And least of all can it be supposed that the Jews would have abandoned a language so respectable for its antiquity and sacredness as their own, for the Greek, or any other whatever.

All

All the accounts of the destruction of Jerusalem by Adrian are such as are absolutely inconsistent with the supposition of the existence of any such church. They all say that, after this event, *no Jew*, without making any exception in favour of christian Jews, was allowed to remain in the place; and they expressly speak of the *new church* which was formed in the place, as consisting *wholly of Gentiles*, persons who made use of the Greek language, Marcus being their first bishop. All modern historians of credit, such as Fleury and Tillemont, as much interested as yourself to find an orthodox Jewish church at Jerusalem, or any where else, understood these historians exactly as I do.

To this mass of evidence from the clearest facts, and the strongest probabilities, your Lordship opposes what is most likely to have been a mere idle story picked up by Epiphanius, of Aquila (the same who translated the scriptures from Hebrew into Greek) being appointed by Adrian to survey the works which he was erecting at Jerusalem, and being converted to christianity by Jews who had returned from Pella; though he expressly says that this return was after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and not after the dispersion by Adrian.

You now say, p. 371, " But the question is  
 " not at what time the Jewish christians whom  
 " Aquila found at Ælia had returned thither, but at  
 " what time he conversed with them. Epiphanius  
 " says he conversed with them at the time that he

“ was superintendent of Adrian’s works at Ælia,  
“ At that time, therefore, there were Hebrew christ-  
“ tians settled at Ælia, or they could not then have  
“ conversed with Aquila.”

But surely, my Lord, as I observed before (third set of Letters, p. 24.) though you have not thought proper to notice it, “ it must be of consequence to  
“ this argument to know whether Aquila was resid-  
“ ing at Jerusalem after the destruction of that city  
“ by Adrian; and this is more than Epiphanius  
“ says, or is at all probable in itself. For the re-  
“ building of Jerusalem by Adrian, in which Aquila  
“ is supposed to have been employed by him, was  
“ undertaken in the thirteenth year of his reign,  
“ a year before the revolt of the Jews, and it was  
“ not till the eighteenth of Adrian that they were  
“ intirely subdued.”

Your Lorpship may well say that I have embar-  
rassed your argument with *chronological difficulties*;  
and when chronology is against a man, he is naturally  
against chronology. Find, if you can, any evidence  
of Adrian carrying on any works at Jerusalem after  
the destruction of that city by him; or find, if you  
can, in any writer, of more or less credit, the mention  
of Aquila, or of any Jew whatever, employed by  
Adrian or not, as residing in Jerusalem after that event.  
Your argument requires that there should be both  
christian Jews, and Aquila to be converted by them,  
at a period when I assert, on the authority of all  
ancient historians, and in no contradiction even to  
Epiphanius,



Epiphanius, your own authority, that neither Aquila to be converted, nor any Jewish christians to convert him, could have been in the place. Let the reader now judge which of us two gets rid of our difficulties, as you say, p. 371, "by making positive testimony "submit to our theories." What I say is from the clearest and most indisputable testimony; and what you say is from *theory only*, unsupported by any testimony whatever, nay in direct contradiction to every testimony which those times furnish.

"I maintain," you say, p. 371, "that there is "no reason to believe that the Hebrew christians "quietly settled at Ælia before the Jewish rebellion "were included in Adrian's edict for the banishment "of the Jews." But were not Hebrew christians *Hebrews*, or *Jews*, and were not *all the Jews*, without any distinction of christians or no christians, banished both from that place, and from the district, by Adrian?

Your Lordship's attachment to *theory*, and your inattention to *facts*, in this case, is not a little curious. To make Jerusalem a safe asylum for the christian Jews after the revolt of their countrymen, you suppose, what is indeed probable enough, that the christians had no concern in it. But that they were *noticed*, and *favoured* by the emperor on that account, is a mere conjecture. You add that, "had they not discarded "the Jewish rites they might have been mistaken "for Jews," and therefore, following your *theory*, according to which they were *not* mistaken for Jews,

and neglecting all authority from *fact*, and contrary both to all probability and the uniform testimony of all antiquity, you say they *had* discarded those rites, which is nothing more than an *inference from a conjecture*.

On the contrary, all antiquity says that the Jewish christians, without making any distinction, were rigorously attached to the observance of their law. Nothing can be more evident that they were so during all the time of the apostles; who also, Paul himself not excepted, conformed to every punctilio of the Mosaic ritual, and never authorized any beside the Gentile converts to neglect it. A system of peculiar rites is, I doubt not, to distinguish that remarkable nation, christians or not, to the end of time; and without being confounded with the rest of the world, they are to be, if there be any truth in prophecy, the most distinguished nation upon earth. Of this I think I have given sufficient proof in the *Theological Repository*, a work from which you, my Lord, though a bishop, might learn much, though it is not probable you ever will.

After these observations I submit the following curious paragraph of your Lordship's, p. 499, to the inspection of our readers. "The disturbed foundations of the church of *Ælia* are again settled. I could wish to trust them to their own solidity to withstand any future attacks. I could wish to take my final leave of this unpleasing task of hunting an uninformed uncandid adversary through  
" the

“ the mazes of his blunders, and the subterfuges of his  
“ sophistry. But I have found by the experience of  
“ this conflict that a person once engaged in contro-  
“ versy, is not entirely at liberty to chuse for himself  
“ to what length he will carry the dispute, and when  
“ he will desist. I perceive that I was guilty of  
“ an indiscretion in discovering an early aversion to  
“ the continuance of the contest. My adversary  
“ perhaps would have been less hardy in assertion,  
“ and more circumspect in argument, had I not  
“ given him reason to expect that every assertion  
“ would pass uncontradicted, and every argument  
“ uncanvassed. Unambitious as I therefore still  
“ remain of the honour of the last word, be it how-  
“ ever understood that, if Dr. Priestley should think  
“ proper to make any further defence, or any new  
“ attack, I am not pledged either to reply, or be  
“ silent.”

My Lord, in humble imitation of your Lordship's style, I will say, the foundations of your church of Trinitarian Jews at Jerusalem, after the time of Adrian, are again, and I will venture to say, *for ever*, overturned; and a church, the foundations of which were attempted to be laid on the grossest calumny, and on the ruins of the fairest character that christian history has to exhibit, could not expect any better fate. And it has fallen where it ought to have done, on the head of the architect. To this *hardiness of assertion*, of an *uninformed* and *uncandid* adversary, it is perfectly indifferent, to *himself* whether your Lordship reply, or be silent. He only wishes to have



have a reply, because he is persuaded that the great *cause* which you oppose will be promoted by it.

If your Lordship should make a fresh attempt to rebuild this favourite church, I hope you will lay its foundations deeper than on an idle story of Epiphanius. For it is not very probable that such a man as Aquila, a Jew, and a translator of the scriptures, consequently a studious and pious man, should have been employed by Adrian in superintending any works of *building* or *fortification*; without considering what you add to this account, or rather in contradiction of it, that this was when all Jews were banished from the place, and Adrian had no works to construct there.

If, however, you will, for want of a better, build on so precarious an authority as this, at least take the pains to understand your author; and also condescend to give some small degree of attention to the humble subject of *chronology*. Otherwise, how pompously and magisterially soever your Lordship may write, *a plain tale will be sufficient to put you down.*

As to your other proofs of the want of veracity in Origen, I am very willing to abide by the defence that I have already made of him in my third set of *Letters* to you. Let our readers judge between us. I shall only observe that, supposing you to have proved all that you there pretend, it would amount to nothing more than such trifling oversights and inconsistencies



sistences as the wisest and best of men, and especially voluminous writers, must be subject to, and such as by no means affect a man's character for *veracity*. It is not from things of so slight a nature as these that you can be authorized to suppose, or suspect, that such a man as Origen would be guilty of so flagrant a violation of truth in the circumstances which I have stated, as you have had the assurance to charge him with.

Your Lordship now joins *me* with Origen, considering us as so much alike, that you say, p. 488, "This art, which Dr. Priestley is so apt to employ, "of reducing an argument which he would refute "by well-managed abridgments to a form in which "it may be capable of refutation, indicates so near "a resemblance between the characters of Origen, "and his *Hyperaspistes*, in the worst part of Origen's, "that perhaps I might not be altogether unjustifiable "were I to apply to the squire, the words which "Mosheim so freely uses of the knight, EGO HUIC "TESTI, ETIAMSI JURATO, QUI TAM MANIFESTO "FUMOS VENDIT, ME NON CREDITURUM ESSE "CONFIRMO."

To this conjunction of myself with Origen I heartily say, Amen. May my character be that of this great man, with all his faults; and then it will be as far removed as I wish it to be from that of the present Bishop of St. David's, whom I scruple not once more to call (as I have abundantly proved the truth of the accusation) a *falsifier* (though I believe not a wilful

wilful falsifier) of *history*, and a defamer of the character of the dead.

To shew that I am not ambitious of having the last word, except where I have something of importance to add, I also freely submit to our readers what your Lordship has added in your sixth Dissertation concerning *Jerom's orthodox Hebrew christians*, in answer to the *fourth* of my *third set of Letters*. That the Ebionites and Nazarenes were only two names for the same set of people, and that they were all, as far as we know, believers in the simple humanity of Christ, I have abundantly proved in my *History of early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ*; and certainly your Lordship's not chusing to look into that work cannot be called an *answer* to it. Till I do see something at least *plausibly* advanced in answer to what I have there alleged, I shall think it unnecessary to say any thing farther on the subject.

I am, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER X.

*The Conclusion.*

MY LORD,

THIS controversy will, I hope, teach your Lordship and others, that whatever effect a bold, contemptuous, and imposing manner may have in *conversation*, it is attended with no lasting advantage in *writing*, when the big words, and haughty airs, may be examined at leisure, and their insignificance be seen through. Your Lordship's insolence has exceeded that of Warburton; but even his learning was not able to gain any lasting credit to the strange paradoxes that he advanced. They served to amuse his cotemporaries, but are now almost sunk into oblivion. What then will be the fate of your Lordship's paradoxical assertions, still more extravagant than his, advanced with greater effrontery, and yet destitute of the least support in a real knowledge of antiquity?

On some of the subjects on which your Lordship advanced to the charge with the greatest confidence, my replies have been so effectual, that you have not attempted any defence, especially with  
respect

respect of that passage of Athanasius, in which he accounts for the great number of Unitarians in the age of the apostles, by saying that "the Jewish christians were so firmly persuaded that their Messiah was to be a mere man, that the apostles themselves were obliged to use great caution in divulging the doctrine of the divinity of Christ." This was the construction that Beaufobre, Dr. Lardner, and I believe every other person who has quoted the passage, put upon it, though, contrary to all probability, you have maintained that he meant the *unbelieving Jews* only, with respect to whom the observation was wholly impertinent.

I have clearly shewn, by a series of quotations from writers of a very early to those of a very late period, that what I have ascribed to Athanasius was the idea of the christian writers in general, and especially that of Chrysostom; so that I think it will hardly be disputed again; and yet what exclamations did not you, and your worthy ally Mr. Badcock, make upon that subject, as if I wilfully misconstrued the passage? But they were the exclamations of ignorance.

On this subject your Lordship has very prudently chosen to be silent. An ingenuous mind, however, would candidly acknowledge the force of an argument to which he was not able to reply. It has more than once been done by Dr. Price, but not once by the Bishop of St. David's; and this is a circumstance



circumstance that marks *greatness of mind* in the one, and *littleness* in the other.

I shall farther observe, at the close of this set of Letters, that the haughtiness your Lordship has assumed as a *churchman*, and the contempt with which you have always affected to speak of *Dissenters*, does not become a man whose grandfather, if I have not been misinformed, was a dissenting minister, and whose father was educated for one. But perhaps this very circumstance may lead to the true cause of the phænomenon; for such is its operation on some minds. Where the suspicion of a leaning to an old connexion will naturally fall, they think they can never do enough to guard against that suspicion.

This controversy, I imagine, has not tended to recommend the Dissenters to your Lordship. It is said that since you have been Bishop of St. David's you have refused to ordain any person educated in the school of a Dissenter, particularly a most respectable one, which has supplied the diocese with many of its most valuable clergymen; alledging that, though they had received nothing more than classical learning from Dissenters, they would be too friendly to them. It looks as if in every Dissenter your Lordship dreaded a scourge to yourself. Your Lordship's diocese, however, is said to abound with them, and on this account you will probably consider it as another *Augean stable*. But it is not a *Hercules* that is sent to it; and I will venture to predict that the number of Dissenters will not be lessened

lessened by your Lordship's means, any more than the number of Unitarians in this country by your controversy with me\*.

Some time ago your Lordship advertized something on the subject of the *Corporation and Test Acts*,

\* Since the above was written, I have been informed that the Bishop of St. David's has sent the following circular letter to the clergy of his diocese.

" REVEREND SIR,

" Sir William Mansell has declared himself a candidate to represent the borough of Caermarthen in the next parliament. I cannot refrain from declaring that he has my heartiest good wishes. Mr. Phillips, the present member, has received the thanks of the Dissenters, for the part he took in the late attempt to overthrow our ecclesiastical constitution by the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. By this it is easy to guess what part he is likely to take in any future attempt for the same purpose.

" I hope that I shall not have the mortification to find a single clergyman in my diocese, who will be so false to his own character, and his duty to the established church, as to give his vote to any man who has discovered such principles.

" I am, Rev. Sir,

Aberguilly, " Your affectionate brother and faithful servant,  
Aug. 24, 1789. " SAMUEL ST. DAVID'S."

This, I should have imagined, was an unjustifiable interference of a member of the *upper* house of parliament, in the election of members for the *lower* house. Be this as it will, it certainly shews his Lordship's great apprehensions for the safety of the established church, which must be good news to the more violent Dissenters. For if, in the opinion of this ever watchful guardian, it be liable to be shaken by such a circumstance as this, its foundation must be very weak indeed, and consequently its downfall may very soon be expected. It would, therefore, perhaps, have been better policy in his Lordship to have concealed his apprehensions by the appearance of a more fearless magnanimity.

To those who have a better opinion of the stability of the church of England, the idea of his Lordship must appear perfectly *Quixotic*. We consider him as such a character as the public has not been entertained with since the days of Sacheverel.

but

but it was suppressed. Now is the time to bring it forward; and we Dissenters wish much to see it; not doubting but that, like every other production of your Lordship's pen, it will, with respect both to *sentiment* and *language*, be a curiosity of its kind.

From the manner in which I have taken the liberty to address your Lordship, on every subject on which you have thought proper to resume the controversy between us (and having had your choice, it cannot be doubted but that you have aimed at what you thought to be the most *vulnerable parts*). Your Lordship may be confident that it will be taken for granted, that you will make a reply, if you think it possible to make one with effect; especially as you now say that you are no longer *pledged to be silent*, and you condemn your former imprudence in prematurely declaring that you would not continue this controversy.

Come forth then again, my Lord, and to all your powers of *language*, be pleased to add those of *argument*. If you have hitherto only trifled, as an *indolent* man naturally might do, with an *uninformed adversary*, unfortunately *ignorant of his own ignorance* (in which, however, your Lordship has obligingly taken some pains to instruct him) trifle no longer. You must by this time have seen the inconvenience of it. To use your own high Platonic language, Come forth with the full *projection of all your energies*, and if possible, overwhelm me at once. Consider, my Lord, that while, in the late war, America was

thus trifled with, it was lost, and take warning by that example. That, my Lord, was a fatal blow to your system of *diocesan episcopacy*, and an unanswerable argument against all that you can allege in favour of the necessity, or expediency, of the *establishment of any form of religion by civil power*.

Build once more, if your Lordship can any where find materials, your favourite church of orthodox Jewish christians at Jerusalem, or assail once more the character of Origen. Bring new arguments to prove that Tertullian's *idiotæ* were English *idiots*, or describe the curious process by which a father may generate a son by contemplating his own perfections. You have topics enow, my Lord, before you, and some of them must not be unworthy of your Lordship's wonderful talents.

As a stimulus to your Lordship, and others in your church, who ought to be equally zealous in the cause of orthodoxy, I shall remind you of the animated exhortation to the study of the christian Fathers with which Cave concludes the *Prolegomena* to his *Historia literaria*.

Having shewn the importance of these studies with respect to the *Catholics* he adds, "Nor\* are  
" new arguments wanting to the prosecution of  
" these studies, especially from the unhappy itch of

\* Neque ad prosequendum hoc nobile institutum nova nobis defunt argumenta, præsertim ab infausa illa ingeniorum nostri temporis in *heterodoxiarum* prurigine quæ tot antiquas hæreses ecclesiæ catholicæ judicio constanter



“heterodoxy in persons of our own age, which has  
 “revived so many ancient heresies, which had been  
 “constantly condemned by the church. The dis-  
 “ciples of Arius, or rather of Photinus, are extend-  
 “ing themselves every where. Seeing their cause  
 “condemned by the tribunal of the primitive church,  
 “they attack antiquity itself, and trample upon the  
 “venerable witnesses of the primitive faith.

“The Nicene creed is a constant beam in the  
 “eyes of these men, and they treat Athanasius,  
 “Hilary, and the other champions of it, worse than  
 “dogs or serpents. They, however, boast of their  
 “antiquity, but it is the offspring of the old serpent.  
 “They have their *Fathers*, but whom? Ebion,  
 “Cerinthus, Symmachus, Theodotion, Paulus Sa-  
 “mosatenfis, Photinus, and others. These they  
 “boast of as their predecessors, and the fathers of  
 “their faith. As to the Catholic writers, they either  
 “reject them, elude the force of their arguments  
 “by sophistry, or, what is more extraordinary, en-  
 “deavour to draw them over to their party.”

constanter damnatas, ab orco revocavit. Pomceria sua longe lateque  
 nuper apud nos dilatarunt famosissimi hæresiarchæ Alexandrini discipuli,  
 seu Photini potius gregales et asseclæ; qui cum videant pro veteris  
 ecclesiæ tribunali se causam suam sustinere non posse, in ipsam insurgunt  
 antiquitatem, et venerandos primævæ fidei testes lacerant, conculcant,  
 execrantur. Perpetua his hominibus fudes in oculis Nicæna fides  
 cujus hyperaspistas Athanasium Hilarium, &c. cane pejus et angue  
 traducunt odio. Habent quidem suam quam jactitant antiquitatem,  
 sed antiqui illius serpentis progeniem. Suos habent patres, sed quos?  
 Ebionem, Cerinthus, Symmachum, Theodotionem, Paulum Samo-  
 satenum, Photinum, et alios.

Hos venditant præcursores suos; his fidei parentibus Unitarii nostri  
 gloriantur. Catholicos aut aperte rejiciunt, aut eorum testimonia  
 sophisticis

“ Our studious youth, therefore, must be exhorted  
 “ to be upon the watch, and must apply with all  
 “ their might to the works of the ancients; that,  
 “ protected by these arms, they may repel the attacks  
 “ of their adversaries, answer their sophistry, and  
 “ successfully defend the cause of the Catholic, and  
 “ consequently that of the English, church. *Stand*  
 “ *ye in the way and see, and ask for the old paths,*  
 “ *where is the good way, and walk therein.* Jeremiah  
 “ vi. 16. These writings will shew us the lurking  
 “ holes of the serpents. These will bring us to the  
 “ very fountain of truth.

“ I shall conclude with an excellent passage from  
 “ Tertullian, ‘ If these things be so, it is plain  
 “ that whatever opinion agrees with the apostolic  
 “ churches, where our faith originated, it is to be  
 “ considered as *true*; since they, no doubt, hold  
 “ what the church received from the apostles, the  
 “ apostles from Christ, and Christ from God. And  
 “ every doctrine is to be considered as *false*, which is  
 “ contrary to that truth which was taught by the

sophisticis argutiis illudunt, aut, quod caput est, in suas sæpenumero  
 partes pertrahere nituntur. Evigilandum igitur studiosæ juventuti  
 totisque viribus scriptis veterum graviter incumbendum, ut his armis  
 muniti adversariorum tela retundant, sophismata solvant, et ecclesiæ  
 catholicæ, ac proinde Anglicanæ, causam feliciter propugnent. State  
 super vias & videte, et interrogate de semitis antiquis, quæ sit via bona  
 et ambulate in ea, Jerem. 6. 16. Hæc nobis serpentum latibula  
 monstrabit, hæc ad ipsissimum veritatis fontem nos recta ducet. Clau-  
 dam hæc optimis Tertulliani verbis. De præscript. Hæret. c. 21.  
 p. 209. Si hæc ita sunt, constat omnem doctrinam quæ cum ecclesiis  
 apostolicis matricibus & originalibus fidei conspiraret veritati deputandum;  
 sine dubio tenentem quod ecclesiæ ab apostolis, apostoli a Christo,  
 Christus a Deo accepit; Omnem vero doctrinam de mendacio præjudi-  
 candam

churches, by the apostles, by Christ, and by God.  
 You therefore who wish to exercise your curiosity  
 in things relating to your salvation, visit the apostolical churches, where the chairs of the apostles still are, and where their authentic letters are read, so that you seem to see and hear them in person. De Prescriptione, cap. 21. 36. Upon the whole, if that be true which was the most ancient, and that be the most ancient which was from the beginning, and that was from the beginning which was from the apostles, it will be equally evident, that that was from the apostles which is held sacred in the apostolical churches." Adv. Marcionem, L. 4. c. 5.

"Furnished with these arms, let us defend our own principles, and answer those who ask a reason of our faith, which we profess to be that which is truly primitive, catholic, and apostolic. Such are our principles, that we have no reason to decline the discussion of them before the tribunal of the purest antiquity. Let us then abandon all

candam quæ sapiat contra veritatem ecclesiarum et apostolorum et Christi et Dei.—Ibid, c. 36. p. 215. Age jam qui voles curiositatem melius exercere in negotio salutis tuæ, percurrere ecclesias apostolicas, apud quas ipsæ adhuc cathedræ apostolorum suis locis præsent, apud quas ipsæ authenticæ literæ eorum recitantur, sonantes vocem, & representantes faciem uniuscujusque. Advers. Marcion, l. 4. c. 5. p. 415. Alibique, In Summa, si constat id verius quod prius, id prius quod et ab initio, id ab initio quod ab apostolis; pariter utique constabit id esse ab apostolis traditum, quod apud ecclesias apostolorum fuerit sacrosanctum.

His igitur armis optime instructi sumus, parati semper nostra tueri, iisque respondere, qui fidei nostræ (quam vere primitivam, catholicam, apostolicam esse sancte profitemur) rationem requisiverint. Neque

“useless pursuits, knotty trifles, violent contentions,  
 “ridiculous and absurd disputations; and let us pass  
 “our time, not in places of public business, or  
 “diversion, running about like buffoons, attending  
 “the levees of the great, and courting their favour;  
 “but in pulpits, in cathedral chairs, and in the  
 “recesses of our libraries; diligently applying to  
 “those studies which have for their object the good  
 “of the church, the salvation of souls, the knowledge  
 “of antiquity, and all useful literature.”

“Do you especially apply to these sacred studies  
 “with all your might who are blessed with ability  
 “and leisure, who are high in rank, and in the  
 “possession of those emoluments which the piety  
 “of our ancestors has consecrated as the rewards of  
 “useful learning, and excitements to greater dili-  
 “gence. Let us distinguish ourselves by piety and  
 “sacred literature. Let the venerable Fathers of  
 “the Catholic church be in everlasting remembrance  
 “with us, and let their writings be held in the  
 “highest honour and esteem. If my writings shall

*animi is est ecclesie nostrae status, ut pro summo purioris antiquitatis  
 tribunali causam dicere defugiamus. Facebat a nobis inutilis omnis  
 studiorum ratio; facebant difficiles nugae, implacabiles rixae, leves et  
 ludicrae disputatiunculae; aetatem teramus non in foro et praetoriis, non  
 aegyptiarum more sursum et deorsum cursitantes, non apud magnatum  
 limina sordidis obsequiis gratiam et favorem aucupantes, verum in  
 rostris, in ambone, intra bibliothecae denique clathros et cancellos,  
 ecclesiae commodo, animarum saluti, antiquitatis cognitioni, bonisque  
 literis promovendis, gnaviter incumbentes. Quin ergo agite vosmet et  
 ad sacra haec studia totis viribus, omnibus nervis contendite; vos,  
 inquam, maxime, quibus melior indoles et liberius otium; dignitatibus  
 ornat, redditibus aucti, quos tanquam meliorum literarum praemia et  
 cumulatiores diligentiae stimulos et incitamenta majorum pietas conse-  
 cravit.*



"contribute in the least to our better acquaintance  
 "with theirs, I shall think that I have not laboured  
 "in vain."

This exhortation of this most excellent man, whose writings, allowing for his prejudices, I highly value, and endeavour to make the best use of, has not been sufficiently attended to by those to whom it was addressed. There would not else have been such a want of learned champions in this controversy, so few who have ventured at all upon the ground on which I have invited them to meet me, and we should not have had such crude opinions as have been advanced by your Lordship, by Mr. Howes, and by Dr. Knowles, who are the only persons of your church who have come upon it; thinking, no doubt, they had some more knowledge of these matters than their brethren, at least more than myself, who have no access to your libraries, and none of those incitements which this writer mentions. If *we* apply to these studies from the pure love of truth, what may not be expected from the members of your church, who have every motive that heaven and earth can hold out to you to go beyond us in them. Let not then the voice of friends, and enemies, who concur in the same exhortation, be heard in vain.

*cravit. Vigeat apud nos pietatis et literarum ecclesiasticarum studium; sint in æterna memoria venerandi ecclesiæ Catholicæ patres; sit scriptis eorum summus honor et æstimatio, quorum notitiam si hæc quam contulimus symbola vel tantillum promovebit, præclare mecum agi putem, meque bonas horas bene collocasse judicabo.*

If the general motives above-mentioned be not sufficient, let particular premiums be proposed in your universities for those who shall give proofs of their proficiency in these studies, and who shall give the best answers to the arguments of Unitarians, from the state of things in primitive times. This is now done in Holland, which is less interested in this controversy than Great-Britain. Your Lordship being now advanced to one of the highest stations in your church, and professing more energy of character than other men, will be expected to do something towards the revival of these useful studies; the want of which you must by this time, whether you will confess it or not, have sufficiently felt. In this one thing then, my Lord, let us act in concert; and if you have any generosity in your nature, lay open the stores of learning locked up at Oxford and Cambridge to us poor sectaries. Let the universities, supported at the national expence, be free to every inhabitant of Great-Britain, and of the world. Throw down the illiberal guard of your *subscriptions to articles of faith* at matriculation, or graduation; and then we shall see who will make the best use of those noble advantages, which now, with so much vigilant jealousy, you keep to yourselves.

If you want a farther motive, consider, my Lord, not only what, with so much justice and energy, your Lordship formerly urged concerning the obligation incumbent on all persons of your Lordship's high station in the church to defend the establishment which supports you, but also the peculiar light in which

which you have been placed with respect to this very controversy.

It is said that your Lordship's bishopric was given you as a reward for your services in the defence of orthodoxy; though wisdom would have dictated that it should have been made to depend upon your final *success* in it. However, you have every motive of *gratitude* to urge you to exert yourself, as much as if your preferment still depended upon it. And consider, my Lord, how much ridicule will be reflected upon yourself, and your benefactors, especially the learned Lord High Chancellor of England, if it should appear that you have been rewarded for a service which you have not been able to perform; and that, by provoking this contest, you have injured the cause of which you are appointed the champion.

Consider also that, high as your past services have justly raised you, your Lordship may still be higher; and to myself it will afford a particular satisfaction, to address you in the style of *my Lord, your Grace*, after having passed from plain *Dear Sir*, and *Reverend Sir*, to that of *my Lord, your Lordship*. But perhaps your Lordship may refrain from a regard to myself; lest having been generally considered as the means of your present advancement, I should (being, as you always represent me, naturally *vain*) be too vain of being the instrument of your farther exaltation.

Report

Report says, that one of the wisest of your Lordship's bench generally recommends silence with respect to such writers as myself. He himself religiously observes it.

Abstineamus, ait, nam lux inimica propinquat.

VIRGIL.

In all events, whether prudence should dictate, that it is *a time to speak*, or *a time to be silent*, my motions will, with all just deference, be governed by those of your Lordship; being at all times, and with all due respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's

Most obedient,

Humble servant,

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY.

7 DE61



L E T T E R S

T O

THE REV. JAMES BARNARD.

Mene igitur Socium summis adjungere rebus  
Nise fugis? Solum te in tanta pericula mittam?

VIRGIL.



# LETTERS

TO

THE REV. JAMES BARNARD.

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## LETTER I.

*Of Mr. Barnard's Idea of Unitarians.*

REVEREND SIR,

IT gives me peculiar pleasure to see a person of your persuasion undertake the defence of your proper doctrine of the trinity; and indeed you Catholics are the only consistent defenders of it. I was glad to find my friend, Dr. Geddes, engaged in this discussion, and am concerned that he seems to have dropped it; though I hope it is only in consequence of his being occupied about his translation of the Bible, a work for which he appears to be singularly qualified. Since, however, he has quitted the field, I am glad to find another person of his communion so ready to defend his ground. I cannot help wishing, however, that you had been possessed of  
of

of his *candour*. For in this, as well as in a knowledge of christian antiquity, you seem to be deficient; and both are requisite to qualify you to enter upon this controversy with advantage.

By saying, as you do, p. 321, "that Unitarians "are those that believe, or *pretend* to believe, the "gospel," you more than insinuate that many of us may be unbelievers; especially as you add, "I "wish every Unitarian would candidly examine his "own heart, and see whether he has not *endeavoured* "to deceive himself, whether he has not *laboured* to "overcome the conviction of his own conscience," &c. Now though I have just the same reason to call in question your christianity, or sincerity, I am not disposed to do it; thinking more favourably, I hope, of mankind in general than you do; and not being willing to charge any man with hypocrisy, or malignity, without some more evident reason than you can have in my case.

Your speculations on the causes of the rise and progress of unitarianism, are not a little curious. Besides ascribing the origin of it, in a general way, to *the devil*, p. 345, you likewise endeavour to trace it to its natural or physical causes. "I cannot," you say, p. 328, "quit the general subject without "taking notice of what I imagine to be the motive "which has induced some learned men first to "become Unitarians, and then to take so much "trouble to oppose the doctrine of the trinity; and "it



"it seems to me to be this. Flushed with their imaginary success in their philosophical researches, they began to think that nothing was beyond the reach of their penetrating genius." &c.

Now, excepting myself, I do not know of any Unitarian writer who has applied to philosophical pursuits. Your description does not at all apply to the most distinguished of the Unitarian writers, Dr. Lardner and Mr. Lindsey.

Having made *the devil* the prime agent in this business, you make the *divine Being* act a subordinate part in it; for having represented the Unitarians as men puffed up with their philosophical discoveries, you proceed to say, that "to furnish them with an occasion of exercising one act of humility, God recalled to their mind the remembrance of the mystery of the trinity. As they found they could not explain this incomprehensible mystery, instead of *humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God*, 1 Pet. v. 6. and acknowledging themselves unable to comprehend heavenly things, John iii. 12. they revolted against his goodness, and began to doubt of the existence of the trinity. From doubts they proceeded to a positive disbelief, and then to an open denial of it. But dreading the name of *heretics* they were willing to give it to the *Gnostics* only, merely because the Ebionites and Nazarenes did not teach the ridiculous doctrine of *Æons*, and thought that they were not comprehended under the general name of *Gnostics*,  
"and

“and therefore not considered as *heretics* by the  
“primitive church.” Whereas you say, p. 331,  
“the Fathers considered all those as comprehended  
“under the generical name of Gnostics, who by  
“any doctrine whatsoever contradicted the doctrine  
“contained in the scriptures, and constantly taught  
“by the apostolic churches.”

Now I am much more willing to acknowledge the hand of *God* than that of the *devil* in this business, though I do not think that you had sufficient authority to suppose it to have been employed in the manner that you describe; and I am very confident that you were not divinely inspired in giving this account of the state of opinions in early times. For nothing can be more evident, as I have abundantly shewn, than that the Fathers in general considered the doctrine of the Ebionites, or Nazarenes, as the very reverse of that of the Gnostics; the latter denying the proper humanity of Christ, and the former his divinity. And, if I may judge from my own knowledge of the actual progress of unitarianism, I must pronounce your account to be nothing better than a romance. Indeed, Sir, you seem to be but little acquainted with the history, or character, of Unitarians; and you should have taken pains to acquire a little more knowledge of the *living*, as well as of the *dead*, in order to qualify yourself for appearing to proper advantage in this controversy.

But how can I expect to escape censure for my account of the opinions of the Ebionites, when you  
tax

tax Origen himself with making the same blunder. For, remarking upon his saying, that "those of the Jews who believed Jesus to be the Christ were called Ebionites;" you say, p. 198, "there is evidently an inaccuracy in this account. For those of the Jews who were called Ebionites did not believe Jesus to be the Christ. They made a distinction between *Jesus* and *the Christ*, for they said that Jesus was the son of Joseph, and that at his baptism *the Christ* descended upon him from above, in the form of a dove, and at the approach of his passion it flew away again, and left him."

Now, of the two, I should think it safer to depend upon Origen's account than yours, especially as it agrees with that of all other ancient writers, who represent the opinion of *Jesus not being the Christ* as peculiar to the Gnostics, and the opinion of the Ebionites to have been that of Jesus being the Christ, but still nothing more than *a man inspired by God*. Both you and the Bishop of St. David's have good reason to be offended with Origen; but you are much more temperate in your anger, thinking that he only wrote *hastily*, and by that means expressed himself *inaccurately*; whereas the protestant Bishop scruples not to call him *a wilful liar*, as he would no doubt have called any other man how respectable soever (for no character I should have thought more sacred than that of the great Origen) whose account of things should have contradicted his own conceptions of them.

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Having

Having stripped me of all pretensions to christianity, you very naturally say, p. 361, that you consider all those who have been baptized by me as no christians. You are astonished, you also say, p. 286, that I “do not reckon Mahometans among “Unitarians, and that I should reject them merely “because they believe in the divine mission of Mahomet. Why, Sir,” you say, p. 287, “should “you object against them upon account of such “scruples as these?” In this I suppose you aim at *humour*, and as I pretend to have nothing to do but with *argument*, I shall leave it unanswered. As to the great question, who are christians and who are not, it will be decided by the proper judge, before whose tribunal both you and I shall meet.

In the last place, however, having made many attempts to penetrate into the hearts of Unitarians, you suppose, p. 332, that I have “a farther design “in my writings than appears upon the face of “them.” For that I may have doubts, and by putting Trinitarians upon defending their principles, may wish to get those doubts removed. If this be the case, I may *not* be *far from the kingdom of God*. It is a much more favourable supposition than most of my antagonists will allow. But indeed, Sir, I must own that they are nearer the truth than you. For I really have not the doubts that you charitably ascribe to me.

I am, &c.

LETTER



## LETTER II.

*Of Mr. Barnard's Arguments from the Scriptures.*

REVEREND SIR,

YOU think it extraordinary, p. 334, that I should have recourse to such guides as the Fathers to settle my opinion concerning the doctrine of the trinity; thinking, I suppose, that the study of the *scriptures* might render all other helps unnecessary. Now I have more than once given my reasons for this conduct. It is, in short, this. Christians are not agreed in the interpretation of *scripture language*; but as all men are agreed with respect to the nature of *historical evidence*, I thought that we might perhaps better determine by history what was the faith of christians in early times, independently of any aid from the scriptures; and it appeared to be no unnatural presumption, that whatever *that* should appear to be, such was the doctrine of the apostles, from whom their faith was derived; and that by this means we should be possessed of a pretty good guide for discovering the true sense of the scriptures.

Even you and Dr. Geddes, though belonging to the same communion, and one which seems better calculated than any other to secure uniformity of  
G 2 opinion,

opinion, are by no means agreed in your interpretation of the scriptures. He, for example, finds no authority whatever for the doctrine of the trinity in the Old Testament, and but little in the New; whereas you find abundant evidence of it in both. You are surprized, you say, p. 11, "that he should make such an acknowledgment, as it is contrary to the universal opinion of divines." But indeed, Sir, your own arguments from the scriptures are of such a nature, as, I dare say, will not induce him to recede from his concession.

You say, p. 11. that Christ must be God because he is called *Jehovah our righteousness*. But for the same reason the city of Jerusalem must be God also, because the same prophet, viz. Jeremiah, gives to that city the very same appellation\*. You also say, p. 31, that Christ must be God equal to the Father, because he is said to be *one* with *him*; whereas Christ himself expressly prays that his disciples may be one with himself and his Father, *even as they two are one*. And when you say, as you somewhere do, that this is necessarily to be understood of such an union as men are capable of with respect to God, which is an union of *will* and *affection* only, and *not of nature*; I answer that the text, in its plain and obvious sense (for which in this controversy you always contend) absolutely excludes the idea of any union between Christ and the Father, besides such

\* A learned friend suggests, that the proper rendering of the original is, "and this is the name by which they shall call *Jehovah*, viz. *OUR* "RIGHTEOUSNESS."

an one as his disciples are capable of, and is therefore decisive against an union of *nature*. Now I really think that it would be much better to acknowledge, with Dr. Geddes, that nothing is to be inferred from the Old Testament, and but little from the New, in favour of the doctrine of the trinity, than urge such arguments as these, or any others that you have produced from the scriptures.

Indeed, what you and all Trinitarians are obliged to acknowledge, viz. that, though Jesus Christ be God, as well as man, he cannot be said to be the *first principle* and *origin* of the divinity, as you say, p. 92, "this being the prerogative of the Father," is inconsistent with any proper *equality* of the persons in the trinity, such as is asserted in the Athanasian creed, viz. that "in this trinity none is afore or "after the other, none is greater or less than the "other." For certainly that which is the *principle* and *origin* to another, if there be any meaning in the words at all, must be superior to that with respect to which it is the principle, or origin.

I am, &c.

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LETTER

## LETTER III.

*Of Mr. Barnard's Historical Arguments of a prescriptive Kind, in favour of the Doctrine of the Trinity.*

REVEREND SIR,

**I**N this letter I shall consider your *prescriptive* arguments, or such as are better known by the name of arguments *a priori*, in favour of the general prevalence of the doctrine of the trinity in the primitive times.

As a proof that the common people in the primitive church must have been Trinitarians, you say, that the bishops being such, the common people who learned of them, must have been so too. Suspecting, however, that there might be something in the evidence that I produced to prove that the common people were *not* Trinitarians, you say, it would afford no evidence (though this is inconsistent with what you said before) of what it was that the apostles taught; since it was not to the *common people*, but to *the bishops and clergy*, their spiritual guides, that the doctrine of Christ was committed.

“If,” you say, p. 141, “he had given the  
“common people a share of administration in  
“spiritual



“spiritual matters; if he had made them the repositories, or trustees, of his doctrine, &c. your argument would have infinite weight; but it was to the apostles, and their successors, that he committed the government of the church.”

As to the common people, you say, p. 143, “he commanded them to follow the faith of their pastors, Heb. xiii. 7. to be obedient to the pastors, who should have the rule over them, and to submit themselves to them, as they were to give an account to God for the souls of all who should be committed to their care, v. 17. He declares that they who hear them, hear him, and whosoever despises them, despises him, Luke x. 16. and he commands the pastors of his church to look upon all disobedient and refractory persons as heathens and publicans, Matt. xviii. 17.” Presuming, then, that the common people well understood and practised this implicit obedience to their teachers, you say, p. 190, “as those bishops taught their flocks the doctrines of the divinity of Christ, and the trinity of persons in God, so it cannot be doubted but that the people believed and professed the doctrine taught them by their pastors, whom they believed to have been appointed by the Holy Ghost to feed and govern them.”

Now, Sir, you should have argued with a protestant on protestant principles. We say that the teaching of Christ and of the apostles was not delivered, even in the first instance, to any body of

men called *clergy*; but that they taught all persons indiscriminately, having nothing to conceal from any man; and there being nothing *mysterious*, or hard to be understood, in the doctrines of the gospel, the common people, or *the laity*, were as good judges of them as the bishops. We also think it the duty of every man to think and judge for himself in all matters of religion; and, in an affair of so much personal importance, to submit his faith to no person as his *spiritual guide*. For what would it avail any man who should be led astray in the paths of ruin and destruction, that his spiritual guide, to whom you say *his soul was committed* accompanied him thither? We think it very evident from the book of Acts, and the epistles of Paul, that the common people among christians knew nothing of this *passive obedience* to spiritual guides; and that in matters of *opinion* the authority even of an apostle had no weight with them, independently of the *reasons* by which it was supported.

I therefore say, that the common people, having received the doctrine of the gospel from the purest original sources, and having been less subject to foreign influences, would retain them better than any other class of men; and consequently that the opinions of the common people among christians in the second and third centuries (in which we have the means of ascertaining them) affords a much better indication of the doctrine of the apostles than the opinions of their teachers; because their teachers, being then learned, and having imbibed the principles

ciples of the heathen philosophy, had been subject to an influence from which the common people were exempt. I have farther observed, and universal experience proves the truth of the observation, that in all cases, ancient opinions are most firmly retained by the common people; whereas the learned and the speculative are most apt to *innovate*; and it is only after some time that they are able to draw the common people after them.

As another argument that the majority of the common people among the christians in early times were not Unitarians, you say, p. 135, that “the expressions contained in the liturgies are a demonstrative proof against it.” But where, Sir, are those ancient liturgies? None that are now extant are prior to the council of Nice, as is acknowledged by all the learned of your own church. We are well satisfied that in those early times no liturgies whatever were in use; but that all those who conducted the public worship of christians *prayed*, as well as *preached, according to their ability*. This we think to be most evident from all that we know of the state of things in the primitive times.

You think it a proof, p. 342, that there were no Unitarians in early times, because there were no persons who were distinguished by *that name*. But how could they be so distinguished, when all christians were Unitarians? They were only called *Unitarians*, when there were Trinitarians to oppose to them.

On

On the same extraordinary principle you say, p. 255, "there is not the least reason to wonder that" "neither Irenæus, nor Clement of Alexandria, should" "take no notice of a sect that never existed till after" "they had finished their works." They certainly existed, but not as *heretics*, persons *out of the church*, or distinguished by the appellation of *Unitarians*. And what you say, p. 285, is far from being true; "that the Unitarians, whether of the clergy or" "laity, were excommunicated as soon as their" "obstinate maintaining of their Unitarian principles" "was known, is a fact so well attested by the history" "of those times that it cannot be called in question." I have certainly called it in question, and you should have considered my arguments.

I am, &c.

LETTER



## LETTER IV.

*Of Mr. Barnard's direct Historical Arguments in  
favour of the Doctrine of the Trinity.*

REVEREND SIR,

HAVING considered all your arguments, of the *prescriptive* kind, in favour of the primitive church having been Trinitarian, I shall now attend to what you have objected to my arguments, chiefly from actual *facts*, that it was Unitarian. I had mentioned the *Clementine Homilies* as affording a strong presumption that the doctrine of the trinity, even in its first and most qualified sense, was unknown in the early ages. To this, to my great surprize, you say, p. 371, "the Clementine Homilies were probably a forgery of Photinus, or of some other person, who not *before*, but *long after* the time of Justin, wrote in defence of unitarianism." But could a work mentioned by Eusebius, and several other early writers, have been written by Photinus, who, it is well known, lived long after them?

I am not so much surprized at this gross anachronism, as at your ascribing to me an opinion which I have repeatedly mentioned not as *mine*, but as held by those whose opinions I am professedly refuting, and which I alledge as a principal argument  
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in my refutation of them. "You yourself," you say, p. 167, and you repeat it, p. 335, "implicitly acknowledge, that the doctrine of Christ's divinity was clearly taught when John published his gospel." And you somewhere add, that though John alone should have taught this doctrine, it was sufficient; because John was an apostle.

I cannot say that I ever remember a more extraordinary misapprehension of any writer's meaning than this of yours concerning me. What I have said, and have abundantly proved, is, that it was acknowledged by all the defenders of the doctrine of the trinity, before and after the council of Nice, that the pre-existence and divinity of Christ had not been taught with clearness and effect before the publication of the gospel of John; and this acknowledgment I have said they would never have made if it had not been extorted from them, by such a well known state of things in their own times, and those preceding them, as they could not account for on any other hypothesis, miserably weak and insufficient as it is. For no Trinitarian is disposed to make the same acknowledgment at present, and they are evidently mortified and confounded that it should have been made in times past. And no wonder; for it furnishes the clearest of all proofs, that before the publication of this gospel, which is supposed to have been after the death of all the other apostles, the christian church consisted almost wholly of Unitarians. And they could not have been considered as *heretics*, because they were *in the church*,

*church*, and indeed had never been taught any other doctrine than the Unitarian.

That this hypothesis of the Trinitarian Fathers is absurd and insufficient, is evident from there being no evidence whatever of any change having been produced in the sentiments of the christian world concerning the person of Christ by the publication of this gospel. In a period much later than this the majority of christians were still Unitarians; and in their opinion the gospel of John contained no other doctrine.

Another curious mistake of yours concerning my meaning is that which occurs, p. 229, where you suppose that I contradict myself when I say that the ancient Unitarians were not considered as heretics, and yet quote Austin and others, as saying that in the age of the apostles there were two kinds of heretics, the Gnostics and the Unitarians. But, Sir, you should have considered in how late a period Austin, and those other writers, lived. In their time, no doubt, the Unitarians were considered as heretics, and therefore it is no wonder that they should represent them as having been heretics in all ages; though, as I have shewn, it is manifestly inconsistent with their own acknowledgments.

You ask, p. 303, why, if the Unitarians were at any time the great body of christians, they did not excommunicate the Trinitarians. To this I have  
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more than once made what I deem to be a sufficient reply. The doctrine of the *trinity*, as it was first advanced, did not appear to infringe so much upon the doctrine of the *unity of God* as it did afterwards; and this infringement was absolutely disclaimed by those who held it. As those who introduced this doctrine were men of learning and character, and zealous christians, it is no wonder that their brethren bore with them. And when these learned Trinitarians came to be the body of the clergy, and had gradually drawn over to them most christians of education, of rank, and fortune; any attempt to excommunicate them would have been ineffectual. But I have shewn that notwithstanding these great advantages on the side of the Trinitarians, the common people, who were Unitarians, were greatly offended at the *innovation*, plausibly as it was introduced, and respectably as it was supported; and that they expressed their dislike of it in very strong terms.

I do not wonder that you, and other Trinitarians, are puzzled with Tertullian's saying that the *major pars credentium*, or the majority of the christians in his time, reprobated the doctrine of the trinity, and that you should use every endeavour to elude the force of my argument from the passage. But your mode of reply to it is singular. In the first place you say, p. 292, that Tertullian being an heretic, his evidence is not to be regarded. But he was no heretic *in this respect*; being as much a believer in the

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the doctrine of the trinity as any person of his age, and therefore as little disposed to make a concession in favour of the Unitarians. And why might not a Montanist, have been an honest man, and one who would not assert a known falsehood. You admit the evidence even of heathen writers with respect to matters of fact of which they were competent witnesses; and why reject that of a Montanist, especially as those of this sect pretended to greater strictness of morals than other christians.

But, what is perhaps still more extraordinary, you say, p. 298, that "by the *simple* and *unlearned*, "Tertullian did not mean the members of the "catholic church," though he expressly calls them the *major pars credentium*, "but all, whether learned "or unlearned, who held the simple or foolish "doctrine of Praxeas," that is, that of the Unitarians. To this I think I need to make no reply, as he is evidently speaking of the *credentes*, or *christians in general*; and with them, though at that time a Montanist, he was probably as well acquainted as any other person of his age.

You think it is a sufficient objection against my supposition of the Antenicene Fathers having borrowed their doctrine of the trinity from Platonism, p. 166, that "they profess never to have looked "upon the doctrines of Plato as constituting any "part of the faith of the christian church." But my argument is not that they *considered*, or *acknowledged*,

*known*, that their doctrine was borrowed from Platonism, but that it was so *in fact*, though they should have denied it. This I prove from the great resemblance between their doctrine of the trinity and the principles of Platonism; a resemblance pointed out, and even greatly magnified, by themselves; from their known attachment to the doctrines of Plato, and from their natural wish to avail themselves of the new idea they hereby got concerning the person of Christ, to make their religion appear to more advantage in the eyes of heathen philosophers, and persons of distinction in their time. It cannot be expected that any persons should introduce into christianity the doctrines of Plato, or of any other philosopher, which they themselves should acknowledge to be foreign to christianity, and discordant with it.

You seem, Sir, to be aware, though you do not explicitly acknowledge it, that the Antenicene Fathers did not teach such a doctrine of the trinity as was professed in a later period; but you apologize for them by saying, p. 88, “ the Antenicene Fathers “ did not speak plainly on the mystery of the trinity; “ the sacraments, and other mysterious truths and “ institutions of the christian religion in their *Apolo-* “ *gies*, and several other of their writings; because “ they either addressed themselves to pagans, or at “ least knew that their works might fall into their “ hands. And certainly it would be highly improper “ to expound these articles to persons who had not  
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“been previously prepared for receiving these sublime truths, in the same manner, and with the same clearness, as they expounded them to *the faithful* in their private and catechistical instructions. For holy and revealed truths are not to be exposed to derision.”

Now, it is evident from the tenor of their writings, that the Antenicene Fathers had no design, or wish, to disguise their opinions from any class of readers, and least of all from the heathens. On the contrary, with respect to their notions of the trinity, they eagerly brought them forward, and enlarged upon them, imagining that they would recommend them to the heathens, by their resemblance to those philosophical doctrines which were held in the highest esteem by them. And yet, in the most express and unequivocal language in the world, they asserted what was disclaimed by the orthodox of a later period, viz. that the Son was greatly *inferior* to the Father, and even that there was a time when he did not exist.

All that the christians of the third and fourth centuries affected to conceal as a *mystery*, were the plainest things belonging to christianity, viz. the baptismal (or as it is commonly called the apostles') creed and the administration of the Lord's supper. This affectation of *mystery*, or *secrecy*, in things which could not be any secret at all, was in imitation of the heathen initiations. It was altogether

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unknown

unknown in primitive times, and was always unworthy of christians. Indeed, Sir, you certainly and most egregiously impose upon yourself in imagining the orthodoxy of the present day to be the same with that of the Antenicene Fathers.

I am, &c.

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## LETTER V.

*Of the Council of Nice, and the Creed which was established by it.*

REVEREND SIR,

**Y**OU are particularly desirous of vindicating Dr. Geddes in his account of the council of Nice, and supporting his prescriptive argument from the opinions of the Fathers who composed it, that unitarianism was not the faith of the primitive church; but you have strangely misapprehended both the doctrine of Arius which was condemned in that council, and the doctrine that was settled in it. "The Arians," you say, p. 192, "contended that Christ was not equal to the Father," and p. 183, "the things defined by the council of Nice  
" were,



“were, that the Son was *coeternal*, *coequal*, and  
 “*consubstantial* with his Father; and this doctrine  
 “never was, neither soon after, nor is it to this day,  
 “abandoned by any divines of our church.”

Now, if there be any truth in history, no person before the council of Nice said, or imagined, that the Son was *equal* to the Father, nor did Arius deny it. This was no part of the controversy with Arius, whom the Nicene Fathers met to condemn; and the Nicene creed, which is in every common prayer book, expresses nothing of the Son being *coeternal*, or *coequal* with the Father, but only of his being *consubstantial*, or of *the same nature*, with him. And though the philosophers of those times thought that a *beam of light* was of the same nature, or substance, with the *sun* (from which the christian philosophers borrowed their idea of *the logos being of the same substance with the Father*) they at the same time held that it was not *equal* to the sun, but greatly *inferior* to it.

In confirmation of the *equality* of the persons in the trinity having been held before the council of Nice, you quote, p. 110, from the *Bibliotheca Patrum*, the epistle of Dionysius of Alexandria to the council of Antioch, in which he says, “there is one Christ, who is in the Father, being his co-  
 “eternal word,” &c.

I am surprized that you should quote this epistle, when there can be no doubt of its being spurious.

Fleury himself says, that "of all the writings of "Dionysius, the only one that remains entire, and "unquestionable, is the canonical epistle to Basilides, "the bishop who had consulted him upon several "points of discipline." There is, however, in Eusebius a small epistle of his to Novatus, which Fleury might think too inconsiderable for him to mention.

Besides, Dionysius, in his controversy with the Sabellians, had been led to express himself in such a manner, as, in a later period, made him suspected of holding the opinion which was afterwards advanced by Arius; insomuch that Athanasius thought proper to write a treatise in his defence. The Sabellians being charged with *confounding* the persons of the Father and the Son, their adversaries maintained that they were so far *different*, as to be of a *different nature*; and the Fathers of the council of Antioch expressly disclaimed the term *consubstantial* as applied to the Son with respect to the Father; though, in opposition to the Arians, the Fathers of the council of Nice adopted that very term themselves. Now, it is very improbable that Dionysius should express himself so differently, as this epistle represents him to have done, from the custom of the orthodox in his time.

With respect to the council of Nice, it is in vain for you to contend for the *freedom* of it, as you do, p. 148. Nothing is more evident than that, by some means or other, probably the influence of Hosius,

Hosius, and other Trinitarians, Constantine had taken his part before the meeting of that assembly. The harshness of his address to Arius in the conference that he had with him sufficiently proves it, to say nothing of his *circular letter* mentioned by Epiphanius, and given at length by Baronius, full of the most outrageous abuse of him. And Sozomen, you know, acknowledges that, from the time that the emperors became christians, the decrees of all the councils were framed according to their wishes. Of the Arian council of Milan you say, p. 177, that "it could not have been free, because it was held in the very palace of the emperor." And was not the same, in effect, the case with the council of Nice, the debates of which the emperor himself attended.

Besides, I have abundantly shewn, in my *Letters to Dr. Geddes*, that the decision of three hundred and eighteen *learned* bishops, assembled so late as the year 325, affords a very insufficient rule for judging concerning the faith of the majority of *unlearned* christians, even in that very age, and much less two centuries before. By that time the learned had made great advances in aggrandizing the person of Christ, as they made another great advance between that time and the council of Constantinople, held A. D. 381, when the doctrine of the *perfect equality* of the three persons in the trinity was established.

As to the conduct of the Unitarians in the council of Nice, which you think so reproachful to them, neither you nor I are able to give any account of it. I do not suppose that there were many Unitarian bishops in that council, or in that age. But as the very term *consubstantial*, which was agreed to be used with respect to the Son at this council, was the very term which the ancient Sabellians had contended for at the council of Antioch, whatever were their reasons (which it is probable I should not approve) for adopting it before, the same would lead them to approve of it now.

I am, &c.

LETTER



## LETTER VI.

*The Conclusion.*

REVEREND SIR,

YOU see that I have complied with your request (Preface, p. 17) in not closing this controversy till I had *considered*, and *replied to* what you, with the best intentions, I doubt not, have been able to allege in defence of those principles which I have attacked. That I have not been *convinced* by your arguments, I acknowledge. But I have not decided without giving my *reasons*, of the strength of which you and the Public may judge. But, being as well satisfied with my opinion as you can be with yours, I certainly stand justified to my own mind, and I hope to yours also, in persisting to use my utmost endeavours to promote the general reception of what I consider to be an important truth, and to bring to a conclusion the long reign of a fundamental error. I am happy to find that I have not written in vain, and that you, Sir, and all my other opponents, have been, in reality, labouring in concurrence with me.

I wish I could lessen your fears with respect to the consequences of the spread of unitarianism.

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You

You say, Preface, p. 10, that "infidelity, deism, neglect and contempt of all religion, both in belief and practice, either keeps pace with, or follows close at the heels of, unitarianism; and that the general corruption of morals, so much complained of in this nation, flows, and must be expected to flow, from the introduction and propagation of such baneful novelties."

Now, Sir, I should think that a very little reflection might convince you that the persons of whose violences you complain, and in consequence of which you say, p. 12, that "the peaceful inhabitants of this nation can scarcely sleep quietly in their houses, or walk the streets with safety; and that the most vigilant father of a family can scarcely preserve his children from seduction, or his property from being plundered," never heard of unitarianism. However, let the judges in their circuits examine into the matter, and report the faith of all those who are condemned for capital crimes. The usual *last dying speeches and confessions* of those wretches do not, I believe, throw any light upon the subject; but perhaps you will say that we bribe them all to be silent. It is a fact, however, that, I imagine, may be ascertained; and let not the vices of the age be imputed to Unitarians, or any other class of men, till they have been proved to be guilty. In my opinion, you may just as well ascribe the increase of vice and prophaneness to the increase of books, the increase of turnpike roads, or the increase of navigable canals.

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On the contrary, it is my firm opinion that the consequence of the increase of knowledge, and especially the prevalence of rational sentiments, will be the increase of virtue; that unitarianism will be the only cure of infidelity; and that it will by this means prevent the evils of which infidelity is the cause.

In the mean time, we Unitarians think ourselves some of the most quiet and peaceable subjects in the realm; that we are very orderly ourselves, and promoters of good order in the places where we reside. As to myself, I wish you would inquire of our common friend, Mr. Berington. He will be able to give an account of me, and I believe a favourable one; and if you would do us the favour to make us a visit, and spend a few days with us, I should not doubt of soon leading you to think more favourably of myself, and of Unitarians in general, than you now do.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your very humble servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

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L E T T E R  
T O  
THE REV. DR. KNOWLES,  
PREBENDARY OF ELI.

Magna petis Phaeton; et quæ non viribus istis  
Munera convenient.

OVID.



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L E T T E R  
T O  
THE REV. Dr. KNOWLES.

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REVEREND SIR,

YOU are pleased to say, in your tract intitled *Primitive Christianity*, Preface, p. 1, that you "wrote " without any view, or design, of entering " into controversy; which you openly *disclaim*, what- " ever may be said or written against you." Yet, as I cannot persuade myself that you really wished to pass unnoticed, and as any thing advanced by a dignitary of the church of England will have weight with some, I shall make a few observations on what you have advanced, chiefly to apprize you that, whether young or old in point of years, of which I am wholly ignorant, you are very young in this controversy, and that it would have been more advisable for you to have *read* a little more before you had attempted to *write*; your arguments for the divinity and worship of Christ are so very stale, and superficial.

You

You would prove, p. 3, that "Christ was the object of worship while he was on earth," contrary to the opinion of all the orthodox christian Fathers, and to what appears upon the very face of the gospel-history, because in our English translation he is said to have received *worship*. You were not aware, I presume, that in the scriptures the same term is applied to *men*, and that therefore, by this argument, you might prove *them* also to be objects of divine worship. You do not even consider what was the meaning of that English word at the time in which this translation of ours was made, when even a court of aldermen was stiled *the worshipful* and persons in other inferior offices were all addressed by the style of *your worship*.

You also say, p. 6, that "Christ must be God because *baptism* is said to have been administered "in his name," without reflecting that Paul speaks of persons being baptized *unto Moses*; so that according to this argument, the Jewish lawgiver must have been God, as well as the christian.

You farther say, that Jesus must be God because he is called *the Son of God*, and that "the Jews all understood the phrase as of the same nature with "God." But was not the apostle John a Jew, and does not he call all christians *the sons of God*?

Your arguments from the Fathers of the first century, shew either an utter unacquaintedness with the state of the writings that are ascribed to them,  
or



or great unfairness in your representations of them, and therefore I suppose the former. You quote Ignatius, p. 27, as upon all occasions calling Christ God, without ever informing your readers that this perpetual addition of the term *God* to the word Christ, in his epistles, is generally considered as an interpolation. It is indeed, a manifest and absurd one, such a phraseology not resembling any thing in that age, or indeed in any subsequent one. Like Mr. Barnard, you quote, p. 80, the epistle of Dionysius of Alexandria, as unquestionably genuine, when it is manifestly spurious; and, like him, p. 98, you speak of the *equality* of the Son with the Father as "defined by the council of Nice" when the Nicene creed says nothing of that *equality*, and the writings of that age shew that the idea had not even occurred to the most zealous Trinitarians in that period.

You quote Justin Martyr, p. 36, as pleading for the worship of Christ *as God*, when the term that he uses (*ὡς Θεὸς*) is far from necessarily implying *prayer*, or any proper *religious worship*; and in the very same sentence it is applied to *the holy angels*; and you only think that you can exclude them by a punctuation, for which there is no authority, or probability.

That Justin Martyr, and others of the Platonizing Fathers, maintained that Christ was *God* is universally acknowledged; but it is evident that they did not consider him as *equal to the Father*.

Among

Among others you quote Novatian, p. 63. But this writer, in the most express terms, disclaims all idea of the *equality* of the Son to the Father, as, if you had read him at all, you must have known. He says, "the Father only is the only good God. "The rule of truth teaches us to believe, after the "Father, in the Son of God, Christ Jesus, our Lord "God; but the Son of God, of that God who is "one, and alone the maker of all things. Though "he was in the form of God, he did not attempt "the robbery of being equal with God. For though "he knew that he, was God of God the Father, he "never compared himself with God the Father, "remembering that he was of the Father, and that "he had his being because the Father gave it him. "The Son is less than the Father, because he is "sanctified by him. God the Father is the maker "and creator of all, who alone has no origin, invisible, immense, immortal, eternal, the one "God; to whose greatness, majesty, and power, "nothing can be preferred or compared —. The "Son does nothing of his own pleasure, nor does "he come of himself, but in all things obeys his "Father's commands." Cap. iv. 9. 27. 31.

You quote Origen, p. 67, as an advocate for praying to Christ. But you should have observed that, in his treatise on the subject of prayer, he argues much at large against praying to Christ. "If," says he, "we know what prayer is, we must "not pray to any created being; not to Christ "himself, but only to God the Father of all, to  
"whom

“whom our Saviour himself prayed —. We are  
 “not to pray to another who has the same common  
 “father as ourselves; Jesus himself saying that we  
 “must pray to the Father through him —. In this  
 “we are all agreed, and are not divided about the  
 “method of prayer; but should we not be divided  
 “if some prayed to the Father, and some to the  
 “Son?” De Oratione, p. 48.

You take it for granted that Cyprian quoted the disputed text in the epistle of John, without informing your readers of any thing that Sir Isaac Newton, and other learned men, have alleged to prove the contrary; without attempting to account for this text not being quoted by any of those Fathers who appear to have taken the most pains to collect passages of scripture in favour of the doctrine of the trinity; and without observing that this text is not to be found in any ancient Greek manuscript whatever; or that it is now omitted by Griesbach, the last and most accurate editor of the Greek Testament. This, Sir, is giving evidence *ex parte*; it is concealing the truth, and misleading your reader.

Notwithstanding your great zeal for orthodoxy, you seem to endeavour not absolutely to exclude us poor Unitarians from all possibility of salvation; but your endeavours are ineffectual. After speaking of the Athanasian creed, p. 122, as “containing the sum and substance of all orthodox  
 “divinity,” you say, “These are the articles which

I

“are



“are declared to be necessary to salvation, and the  
“scripture has declared the same. For the whole  
“fabric of christianity rests upon them. But it  
“does not follow from hence, that the belief of  
“every tittle in the creed, however true, and re-  
“ceived by ourselves as such, is therefore the  
“necessary condition of the salvation of others.”

This, Sir, is like opening the door, and instantly shutting it again, without giving us an opportunity of entering. For if your premises be true, the belief of all the articles of this creed must be *universally* necessary to salvation, to *me* as well as to *you*. Indeed you seem to say as much in what immediately follows, “Surely then none need be  
“offended at the public repetition of it in our  
“churches; for it condemns none but those who  
“will not believe, and be saved.” I suppose, then, that if I do not believe, you will say that I *would* not believe, though I should allege that I *could* not; and therefore, in your opinion, my salvation, notwithstanding the utmost extent of your charity, is not at all the nearer. It is happy for me, Sir, that you are not my judge.

You have done very prudently to decline proceeding in this controversy. Had you persisted, I should have given you a little advice how to conduct yourself better. I only fear that it may be suspected by some, that you are no real friend to the doctrine of the trinity, and that you meant to betray  
the



REV. DR. KNOWLES.

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the cause by seeming to defend it. In this, however, I acquit you, firmly believing that you are a weak friend, and not an insidious enemy, to the cause of orthodoxy.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your very humble servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

7 DE61

L E T T E R S

T O

THE REV. JOHN HAWKINS,

Rector of Hinton, near Alresford, Hampshire.

Ο Κίρκη, πως γὰρ με κέλη σοι ἡπιον εἶναι,  
Ἡ μοι σὺς μὲν ἐθήκας ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν εἰαίρης.

HOMERI ODYS.





# L E T T E R S

T O

THE REV. JOHN HAWKINS.

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## L E T T E R I.

*Of the Object and Spirit of Mr. Hawkins's Address.*

REVEREND SIR,

YOU have, in the course of your *Expostulatory Address* to me, so frequently, and in such varied phrase, expressed your *surprize* and *astonishment* at my sentiments and conduct, that, without being guilty of plagiarism, I cannot tell how to express what I think of yours. Perhaps you were aware of this, and thought to escape by this means. There is not, in fact, however, any proper cause of *wonder*, either with respect to my conduct, or yours; and both may be very well accounted for, without any extraordinary knowledge of human nature. I shall only mention one occasion of surprize to me *at the time*, though it is not at all so at present. This was that, notwithstanding our frequent inter-

views, and occasional correspondence, in which each of us advanced, without the least apparent constraint, whatever occurred to us, and in which *this controversy*, and the business of *subscription*, were sometimes mentioned, you never expressed the least disapprobation of my conduct, nor had I any suspicion of it till this *printed expostulation* was announced to me.

You say, p. 2, that your "private sentiments of me are those of friendship and respect." Mine to you were the same, with the addition of the most undisguised frankness. Why then not hint to me, what you now publicly declare, that "my opinions were dangerous," that my manner of propagating them "tended to introduce confusion and discord into the community," and that "many of my writings," p. 52, "have been the source of unhappiness and universal scepticism. For it is," you say, "an undoubted fact, that several serious christians have been so far disquieted by them, as to lose their inward peace, that others have been thrown upon the verge of infidelity, and that thousands of those who already held all religion in contempt, or totally neglected its duties, have been greatly confirmed in their unbelief, or their tepidity; being persuaded, by these obstinate altercations, that there was neither certainty in religion, nor any real charity in those who profess to be guided by its influence, since they are thus disturbing society for a few metaphysical subtilties, in points which lie intirely beyond the reach of human conception." Why did not you tell me then

then (for it was the part of a *friend*) as you do now, that I was "not acting a friendly, or a justifiable, part with regard to society."

Inconsistently, however, with all this, you say, p. 55, that "you are far from any design to cast any reflection upon the uprightness of my motive, or the sincerity of my belief in revealed religion." How then, Sir, in *Foro Conscientiæ*, is my conduct less justifiable than yours? If it be public *disputation* that does the mischief, your guilt is manifestly greater than mine; as by this publication of yours you are promoting the very thing that you condemn. On the contrary, I engage in this controversy, and urge it by every method in my power, because I believe it to be subservient to a great and public good, viz. the overturning of error, and the establishment of important truth. I rejoice to see this faggot of *yours* thrown into that fire, which I hope will not be extinguished till it has effectually answered the end for which I have excited it, and I am happy to think that it has already done this in a great measure. It is not, I hope, the last faggot that you will contribute.

Why did not you tell me during our frequent intercourse, as you do now, that I ought to have written in *Latin*. Speaking of my publications in this controversy, "you ought," you say, p. 47, "in my opinion to have published them in a form and language to which the learned only could have access, and not in cheap flying pamphlets, &c."

“ &c. —. Neither can I see any sufficient motives  
“ for your publishing *at all* your opinions on *matter*,  
“ *spirit*, and *philosophical necessity*, which, could they  
“ possibly be proved, are mere metaphysical specu-  
“ lations, that can answer no useful purpose, and yet  
“ may in the mean time lead thousands into error  
“ and perplexities.”

That any man liberally educated, professing a regard to truth, and the great business of enlightening the minds of all men, should write in this manner would have appeared extraordinary, if it had not been sufficiently of a piece with the rest of your pamphlet; though it is sufficiently discordant with your other publications, in defence of the *Reformation*, in which you know that every attempt was made to awaken the attention, and enlighten the minds, of the most illiterate. In answer to what you here allege, it is sufficient for me to say, as Luther would have done, and as the apostles would have done before him, that I write in order to be *understood*, and that I wish to instruct the *common people* in matters which appear to me most nearly to concern them, and therefore I write in a language which *they* understand. I also write for the instruction of the *poor*, and therefore I make many of my publications as *cheap* as possible.

Besides, the Bishop of St. David's will tell you, that I am so far from being able to write in Latin, that I cannot even read that language, so that you are urging a man to *run*, who cannot *walk*,

or



or even *stand*. However, I shall certainly assume the right of judging for myself, both with respect to the *subjects* on which I write, and the *language* I make use of. Your censure of my conduct in this respect equally affects Mr. Locke, and the greatest men who ever lived. How then could you imagine that your advice should not be considered as impertinent, and absurd?

You say, p. 2, that you are "far from studying "to make my expressions appear frightful," as many of my antagonists have done; at the same time that you have taken pains, p. 46, &c. to collect from all my publications every thing that you could bring together of the kind; and by taking the passages out of their proper connexion, and without contrasting them with any others of a different nature (which, had you been so disposed, you might have found in abundance) you have done every thing in your power to raise the indignation of your readers against me; in fact, more than all my other antagonists put together.

You must know, Sir, that the writings of no person whatever, especially of so voluminous a writer as myself, will bear to be treated in this manner. The scriptures themselves will not bear it. For *truths* artfully placed together, will appear *untruths*; and the most candid and benevolent man living may, by the same management, be exhibited as the most uncandid and malignant.

Notwithstanding

Notwithstanding the friendship you express for me, it is evident from what you have written, that you would rejoice in my death, as much as you did in that of my friend Mr. Palmer, whose early decease I lamented, as being *cut off in the beginning of his usefulness*, "that is," you say, p. 53, "whilst he was doing his utmost to unhinge the faith of mankind, laying plans to prove that Christ was a mere mortal like himself, and studying to demonstrate the impossibility of the truth of the chief particulars in the history of his miraculous conception. The hidden ways of providence," you add, "are beyond the reach of man, and it were presumption to pry too curiously into the secret designs of the Almighty. Yet it is highly probable, that many who consider the interests of pure christianity in a very different light to what Mr. Palmer did, may also have formed very different conjectures upon his *sudden* removal, and be inclined to pay their grateful thanks to heaven, for what they possibly may conceive to be a peculiar instance of its watchfulness over the interests of true religion."

Now had I died twenty years ago, these remarks you will, no doubt, think would have been rather more applicable to *myself*. I would farther observe that, whatever is the proper object of *gratitude* to God after it is bestowed, is always deemed to be a proper subject of *prayer* while the event is depending. Since, therefore, you would be thankful to God for my death, I must presume that your sentiments

ments and conduct are consistent; and consequently that you *pray* for it. And what signify *prayers*, Sir, without *endeavours*? But, being of opinion, perhaps, that I have already done all the mischief that I well can, you may think it not worth your while to run any risque in order to cut off the little of my life that is left.

You style your address to me an *Expostulation*, being intended, I suppose, to dissuade me from pursuing this controversy. But you may easily perceive that your advice comes too late, and that the business is nearly over. Such an address as yours, to have done any good, should have been presented at the very outset of the business, before my measures were so decidedly taken, as you must perceive they now are. In these circumstances, if you had meant to serve *the cause* that you have espoused, and not *yourself* only, you should have fairly entered into the *argument*, and have attempted to refute what I am endeavouring to prove. Instead of this, you content yourself with what is abundantly easier, viz. giving your *opinion*, which must be considered as very assuming, till your opinions shall have acquired more weight with the learned. Time, and long experience of a man's ability, knowledge, and integrity, are requisite to give credit to what any man should only confidently *assert*, without condescending to give any *reasons* for his assertions. And yet this is all you have done with respect to the proper subject of this controversy.

What



What I have professed to maintain is, that the primitive christian church was Unitarian; and for this I have given my *reasons*, much at large. But instead of examining any of those reasons, we find nothing but your own *ipse dixit*. "I flatter myself," you say, p. 1, "that it possibly may be of some little service, as well to the general cause of religion, as to the quiet of those individuals who, from the extraordinary clamour that has been raised against the tenet, *which has hitherto been held with astonishing unanimity by the great body of christians in every age and nation*, have been led to apprehend that the whole system of revealed religion is built upon some unstable foundation, upon some prejudicated notions, of which the fallacy is likely to be soon demonstrated."

Now, Sir, they must be very strange people, and hardly worth giving satisfaction to, who could imagine that the whole of revealed religion is in danger by establishing the doctrine of *one God*, and the divine mission of Christ from this one God, to teach the doctrines of the resurrection and of future judgment. This is the *system of revealed religion*; and how is this in danger of being overturned by my endeavours to prove that this messenger from God to man was *a man*? Will it be suspected that Moses, another messenger from God to man, was an impostor, because he was nothing more than a man? If you have no doubt of *my* being a sincere believer in revealed religion, why should you entertain any suspicion with respect to those who



who may be influenced by my writings. I shall hardly make any of my readers worse than myself. But, in any event, why should I, or the public, take your *mere word* for the state of opinions in early times. You must think highly of yourself indeed to imagine this.

You say again, p. 48, speaking of the doctrine of the trinity, "I am satisfied that it has been the general sentiment of all christians for seventeen hundred years. For whereas you have asserted that, during the four first centuries, either the majority, or the multitude, believed the simple humanity of Christ, and were really Socinians, I am convinced that, from the very time that the apostolic mission was completed, even to the present day (if we except a few turbulent years in the days of Arius) the grand majority of such christians, who can properly be said to have had any opinion at all, believed, in some sense or other, in the divinity of Christ."

From reading this, a stranger would naturally conclude that I had done nothing more than *you* have done in this business, viz. that I had contented myself with *asserting* that the majority of christians in early times were Unitarians; whereas I have written a large work to *prove* it; and my *proofs* are not to be answered by your confident *assertions*.

It will be taken for granted that, as you have thought proper, for some reason or other, to take a  
part

part in this business, and have taken so much pains to explain the nature of the trinity, if you could have done any thing with respect to the proper hinge of this controversy, by shewing from clear historical evidence, that the primitive church was strictly Trinitarian, you would have done it. For admitting all that you have contended for, viz. that the doctrine of the trinity is *credible* in itself, and that the articles of the church of England are such as an honest man may subscribe, it amounts to nothing, unless you can prove them to be *true*.

You repeat, indeed, some hackneyed arguments from the scriptures; but you know that I consider all arguments of that kind as sufficiently exhausted on both sides, and therefore have chosen a new field of argument. It is curious enough that you should make such a parade of *meeting* me, and yet carefully avoid every place where I profess to come. However, as you will not come upon my ground, I will, as far as is consistent with my plan, meet you on your own.

I am, &c.

LETTER.

## LETTER II.

*Of Inconsistencies in Mr. Hawkins's Ideas of the Nature of Subscription.*

REVEREND SIR,

AS a great part of your letter to me, as well as of that to Mr. Berington, is employed on the subject of *subscription*, on which I have addressed the *candidates for orders* in the two universities, I shall, for their sakes, consider what you have advanced with respect to it.

Having quitted the church of Rome because you could not approve of her tenets, or her discipline, I do not wonder that you hesitated, as you say you did\*, before you could subscribe the articles of the church of England. For if, as you very justly observe†, “they, and they alone can conscientiously “subscribe, who can truly and honestly assent to “the articles, in a fair and literal interpretation of “the terms;” it must be exceedingly difficult to a person who coolly considers the great number of distinct propositions, an assent to which the subscription of the articles requires, to give an unfeigned

\* *Defence*, p. 20.† *Address*, p. 38.

assent to them *all*, consistently with the principles on which you dissented from the church of Rome; especially as you condemn the conduct of the Dissenters from the church of England, and consider *schism*\* as “a sin of the deepest dye;” so that you tell your friend “it concerns both you and us, as “we value our salvation, to dread the imputation “of it.” It is, indeed, steering between *Scylla* and *Charybdis*; and I fear you, Sir, have not escaped a rude shock in the passage.

There are, I think, evident traces of a bias upon your mind, which may have had more influence than you are distinctly aware of, in the preference you have given to the church of England; even supposing a view to the *emoluments* of it to have been wholly out of the question. You say†, that you had “a *wish* to adhere to an episcopal church;” and that after your suspense about subscription, you were determined by “a person of literary and religious eminence;” a member, I presume, of the church of England, because your decision was in favour of it. But had your mind been really unbiassed, you would have consulted with persons *out* of the church as well as those *within it*; and you might have found persons of literary and religious eminence among *them*. To consult with *none* but those of whose opinion we are well apprized, and to decide according to their opinion, is generally con-

\* *Defence*, p. 72.

† *Defence*, p. 211.

sidered



sidered as a proof that the *choice* preceded the *consultation*; and you should have avoided the suspicion of this.

That the step was not taken with the full and unwavering assent of your mind, may, I think, be inferred from your occasionally throwing out such generous sentiments as are inconsistent with your subscription; as when you say\*, “the pale of the church should not be narrower than the apostles left it;” and † that “the eunuch and jailor made a sufficient profession of their faith.” For certainly this was a very scanty faith compared with that in all the articles of the church of England. Many could subscribe the former, who would be excluded from communion by the latter. This narrowness, therefore, you must disapprove.

Your plan of a truly *catholic system of religion*, I greatly approve; but it is a plan very different indeed from that of the church of England. “How easily,” you say ‡, “might a truly catholic system of religion be drawn up among christians. Their canon of scripture should contain those books only which all agree to have been never doubted of by any considerable part of the christian church. Their form of worship should be such as all allowed to be lawful, though all might perhaps not think it advisable to adopt; their creed to contain such articles as all acknowledge

\* *Defence*, p. 36.

† *Defence*, p. 58.

‡ *Defence*, p. 83.

“to be revealed, expressed in scriptural terms only,  
“and whatever regarded discipline only to be regulated by each national church, as circumstances might direct. Beyond the plain declarations of scripture every thing should be considered as matter of *opinion* only, and no consequences of opinion should be charged on any which they positively disown. This,” you add, “with a sincere love of truth, and a mutual performance of such duties of charity as all christians owe to each other, would unite them all in one communion, and one society; and a variation of discipline would then be no more a matter of dispute than a variation in language or in climate. With hand and heart I shall ever be happy to promote so desirable a coalition.”

Then, Sir, with hand and heart you will promote a great change in the church of England. For substituting particular *congregations*, for *nations*, and your plan is the utmost extent of my wishes. But are you promoting such a plan as this by giving your assent and consent to the creed, and forms, of a church which is the very reverse of what you have so beautifully described? Your creed certainly contains many more articles than are *clearly revealed*, and they are not expressed in *scriptural terms*. And if a mere variation of *discipline* appear to you to be so very inconsiderable a thing, how can the sin of *schism* be so great as you have represented it, when you make a man's *salvation* to depend upon it? And how can you justify such an interference of  
civil

civil power in the support of religion as the church of England has recourse to? To become a member of the church of England, with such ideas as you here express of a much better church, is, in effect, saying with Medea in Ovid, *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*.

Nay though, in this passage, you discover a predilection for *national churches*, you do not seem to be fully determined on the subject. For you say\*, "How far it may be proper that Dissenters should contribute to the maintenance of the established clergy, I am not sufficiently clear." And if so, you cannot be sufficiently clear that there should be any *national*, or *established*, church at all. For if the clergy were only paid by the members of the establishment, or those who attend upon their ministry, and not by the nation at large, their mode of worship would no more be *established* than that of the Dissenters, whose ministers are also paid by those who attend upon *them*. However, as you profess to have *scruples* on this subject, and the apostle Paul says, *he that doubteth is damned if he eat*, I take it for granted that you will decline taking the tithes of your dissenting parishioners.

When I read the paragraphs above recited, and find you tell your friend†, that "the necessity of an unerring guide is of our own creating" (thinking, I suppose, that the *scriptures* are sufficient, and all

\* *Defence*, p. 98.

† *Defence*, p. 130.



human creeds unnecessary) I conclude that when you wrote them you were not far from being a Dissenter. And though you had conformed, you had not at that time any emolument in the church. I doubt not, therefore, but that you wrote from your real feelings; and though, after much suspense, your predilection for an *episcopal church* (that is, for a church in which there were bishops, and in which a man might be a bishop, which I sincerely wish you may be) and the arguments of your episcopal friend (who has since, I understand, given you some preferment, and is said to have promised you more) determined you in favour of the church of England, the traces of your former more liberal sentiments were never effaced; and on this principle I account for the inconsistencies which appear in your writings on the subject.

Also, writing as you do from your real impressions *at the time*, and those having been various, you have left traces of other principles of subscription besides that on which you placed it above, viz. "the literal meaning of the words that you "subscribe." You say, indeed\*, "To the *doctrines* "we assent for the sake of truth, and to the *terms* "in which mankind have long agreed for the sake "of peace." But in other places a regard to *peace* seems to have carried you farther than this. You say †, that the articles of the church of England are not so much *articles of faith*, as *articles of church*

\* Address, p. 5.

† Address, p. 36.

*communion;*



*communion*; and \* “to the laity they are articles of “peace [and doctrine] and that the belief of these “articles are not so necessary as to exclude from a “federal right to church communion, such as do “not think them *all* conformable to revelation.” Here I cannot help thinking the words *and doctrine*, which I have inclosed in brackets, to be an interpolation; for if the articles are not to be *believed*, how are they articles of *doctrine*. I dare say they were not in the original composition, with which they are so discordant, but were added afterwards, without considering how they would accord with the rest of the sentence.

Now if the laity may be members of your church, though they should not believe all its articles, may not the clergy be admitted on the same terms? The lay members are, no doubt, supposed to join in every part of your public service, and particularly in the recital of your *creeds*; and as you pronounce the everlasting damnation of all who do not believe every article of the most rigid of them, you surely cannot think them proper subjects of church communion? *What fellowship has light with darkness?* You will, at least, make it an unpleasant service to them, if not to yourselves.

I should also wish to be informed of the meaning of the phrase *articles of peace*, of which you have not given any explanation. I can imagine no other

\* *Defence*, p. 47.

than that they are such articles as a man may chuse to subscribe rather than *quarrel* with other *persons*, or with such *things* as are not to be obtained without subscription, whether he believe them or not. For if he really believed them, they would certainly be intitled to the appellation of *articles of faith*. On the whole, therefore, I suspect that there was a time when you considered them merely as *articles of peace*, to the clergy as well as the laity; or such articles as, because you could not have better terms, you chose to subscribe rather than *quarrel* with the established church, and the appendages of it.

Though you say, as above\*, that “ the articles  
 “ are not to be subscribed merely as far as you  
 “ think them scriptural, nor merely as articles of  
 “ peace, nor because they exhibit upon the whole a  
 “ better system of religion than is found in any other  
 “ society; but must be able fairly to declare your  
 “ belief of the several points which they contain,  
 “ in the very words in which they are offered to  
 “ our acceptance;” I think I can perceive in another  
 passage of your *Defence of the Reformation*, that you  
 once thought otherwise. For you say†, “ I shall  
 “ continue in the church till I discover a better,  
 “ one that maintains a more equal medium between  
 “ fanaticism, superstition, and indifference, where  
 “ the doctrines are more conformable to revelation,  
 “ and the discipline to reason; where fewer defects  
 “ are found, and the free and liberal mind has a

\* Address, p 42.

† Defence, p. 210.

“ fairer

“fairer field to range in. In some points,” you add, “relative to morality and religion, both you and I submit, although we do not pretend to assert that they are perfectly free from all obscurity. A man is sometimes called upon to act, though partly in the shade. Complete evidence on each occurrence, or absolute perfection in the object of his choice, are seldom within his reach. If he sees enough to guide him, to that which seems best, he may, often must, proceed; and it will be a ridiculous excuse for a man to remain irresolute and inactive, that possibly there might exist a more perfect plan of action than that which he had adopted.”

This, Sir, is cautiously expressed, and more seems to have been *meant* than directly *meets the ear*. It is easy to perceive the real state of mind under which you wrote this paragraph, and that you have not fully expressed your real feelings. If you had subscribed *ex animo* to the plain sense of what was proposed to you, why make this intricate apology, which, after all, does not apply to the case. You were aware, I doubt not, of the great difficulty of reconciling many of the articles to reason and the scriptures; but you were willing to think that in any other established church (and among these alone your choice lay) you would find more objections of the same kind, and therefore you made the best you could of *these*. You would have expressed yourself more intelligibly, if you had said in fewer words,



words, "Of two evils I chose the least. In any  
 "established church (and in some one of them I was  
 "determined to abide) I must have done more or  
 "less violence to my conscience; and there was  
 "that in the church of England which made her  
 "communion more easy to me than that of the  
 "church of Rome."

That your mind has been much harassed about  
 this business of *subscription*, and that you have strug-  
 gled hard to reconcile yourself to it, is evident from  
 another most glaring inconsistency in your language  
 on the subject. You say\*, that "the articles are  
 "not to be subscribed as far as we think them  
 "scriptural," which you say, "would be trifling  
 "with common sense and honesty." And yet you  
 say†, "It should satisfy the scruples of the most  
 "timorous conscience, that our church has declared  
 "that nothing is to be required of any man which  
 "cannot be proved from the written law; and  
 "consequently whatever ideas, or explanatory com-  
 "ments, any particular person affixes to some of  
 "its declarations or expressions, yet if this sense is  
 "either inconsistent with other parts of its articles  
 "or creeds, or is plainly contradictory to scripture,  
 "or obviously clashes with the evidences of natural  
 "reason, he may be confident that this is not the  
 "sense in which either his assent or subscription is  
 "desired."

\* Address, p. 42.

† Defence, p. 52.

Now



Now you could not, Sir, in plainer terms than these have said the very reverse of what you advanced before. For it is saying that the articles *are* to be subscribed as far as we think them scriptural, and in no other sense whatever. On this principle I myself am fully authorized by you to subscribe the articles of the church of England. For thinking them to be plainly *contradictory to scripture*, and also obviously *clashing with the evidences of natural reason*, I may be confident that whatever I find in them contrary to the Unitarian doctrine, is not the sense in which my assent or subscription was required. Any other person also, let his real opinions, and consequently his idea of the meaning of scripture, be what they will, may think himself authorized to subscribe the same articles; because he must judge for himself what he thinks to be agreeable to the scriptures, and whatever is agreeable to *them* must be presumed, as you say, to be agreeable to the true sense of the *articles*.

Which now, Sir, of these two contradictory principles of subscription must we conclude to be yours? I cannot help suspecting that your ideas of this subject have changed, that you subscribed on one principle, and now defend your subscription on another; and yet the change must have been very quick, since both these publications are the productions of the same year. However, as your *Defence of the Reformation* was printed before your *Address to me*,  
and

and it is in the former of these that you defend subscription on the idea of the articles containing nothing contrary to the scriptures, I conclude that at the time of subscribing you thought that you had occasion for that *salvo*; but that afterwards you thought you could make a better defence on the other principle, viz. that of the *latitude of interpretation*, which I shall consider more particularly in the next letter; and in short, that you were no real believer of the articles either when you wrote the *Defence*, or the *Address*.

I am, &c.

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### LETTER III.

*Of a Latitude in the Interpretation of the Articles of the Church of England, and of the Scriptures being a Commentary on the Articles.*

REVEREND SIR,

**T**HOUGH you plead for subscribing according to the *literal sense of the words*, you plead for a *latitude of interpretation*, which, in the light in which you consider it, appears to me to be fully equivalent to any other mode of subscription, and to leave you as much at liberty to think for yourselves.

This

This latitude of interpretation you say\*, “the legislature designedly left us.” But where is the evidence of this? It does not appear in any act of the legislature, or in any writings of the age; nor does it appear to have been thought of, till it was suggested by Bishop Burnet; who being an Arminian took great pains to shew that a person who was no Calvinist might subscribe your seventeenth article, but which all who are Calvinists say most clearly expresses their own opinions, and no other.

If these articles were drawn up, as the compilers say, “to prevent diversity of opinion,” they would never have expressed themselves in such a loose manner as equally to admit persons who thought so differently from each other; and who were so violently hostile to each other, as the Calvinists and Arminians of that age were? The compilers of these articles, like all other writers, intended, I no doubt, to express their own ideas as clearly as they could; and no more thought of admitting into a church, which they wished to guard by this subscription, those who held opinions different from their own, on the pretence of a *latitude of interpretation*, than by subscribing them as *articles of peace*, or in any other way that does not imply a belief of them at all. This latitude of interpretation I cannot help considering as a very dangerous thing, opening a door to the most sophistical perversion of language, and the most shameful prevarication.

\* Address, p. 42.

Is there not as much evidence of the *scriptures* admitting this latitude of interpretation, as the *thirty-nine articles*; and if the use of it be to make room for *diversity of opinion*, I do not see why the latitude of interpreting *scripture* might not have answered this purpose, as well as the latitude of interpreting the *articles*; and therefore the compilers of these articles, if they had the ideas that you ascribe to them, might have saved themselves all their trouble, and have required a subscription to the *scriptures* only. In reality, by this latitude of interpretation you yourself most evidently contradict the *text*, when you say\*, that "they are not Calvinistical." For if they do not express the ideas of Calvin with respect to the doctrines of *grace*, *original sin*, and *predestination*, it is not easy to say where genuine Calvinism is to be found.

I am still more surprized that you should say†, that "the belief of the more moderate Socinians, when reduced to its most simple, as well as most decent expression, and that of the church of England, as set forth in a general meeting of her divines at Oxford in the year 1695, differ much less from each other than is usually presumed." This, Sir, leads me to think that your own real sentiments are not very different from what you would call *moderate Socinianism*. But by what strange latitude of interpretation must it be, by means of which Calvinists, Arminians, and Socinians, might

\* Address, p. 39. † Address, p. 4.



all subscribe the same articles, drawn up with such studied precision, purposely to exclude *diversity of opinion*? The compilers must have been very unfortunate in expressing their own opinions, if they had any at all.

You most strangely say\*, that "the compilers of the articles refer to the scriptures for a more particular comment." On the contrary, nothing can be more evident than that the articles were intended to be a comment on the *scriptures*, that is, to declare in what sense the scriptures are to be understood. And as the *commentary* is always more full and explicit than the *text*, and is written *after* the text, in order to supply its deficiencies; if the scriptures themselves had been thought sufficiently *full* and *explicit*, the compilers of the articles would doubtless have saved themselves the trouble of making their text. The articles themselves declare that they give the sense of the scriptures; in other words, that they are a comment upon them, and the compilers never refer to the scriptures for a fuller or clearer account of what they have expressed in a more concise and less intelligible manner.

Indeed, Sir, nothing can be more absurd than your idea of the *articles* being *the text*, and the *scriptures* being *the comment*; and your willingness to have the articles considered in this light is opening another door to subscription which the com-

\* Address, p. 39.

pillers themselves evidently meant to shut, but without which you, Sir, could not have so conveniently entered. On the whole, I conclude that you first subscribed these articles as *articles of peace*, the meaning of which it is not easy to understand, except negatively, that they are *not articles of faith, or things to be believed*; but reflecting afterwards that this idea would not so well bear a public discussion, you chose another ground of defence, that of the *literal sense with a latitude of interpretation*. Indeed, it is too common a thing for men to act from one principle, and then to vindicate their conduct on another.

That you have been unwilling to consider the articles of the church of England as necessary to be *bona fide believed* by all the subscribing members, is farther evident from your saying\*, that “though  
“they were enjoined, as the title prefixed to them  
“imports, to prevent diversity of opinions, and to  
“establish consent touching true religion, this is  
“chiefly to be understood with reference to *exterior*  
“*government and discipline*. The legislature never  
“designed that all men should explain them exactly  
“alike, and therefore purposely expressed them  
“with a degree of generality and latitude which  
“might answer every end of peace and good order  
“in society, over which it was appointed to rule  
“and govern; at the same time that it was un-  
“willing to tie down every member of its ministry

\* Address, p. 38.

“to the same precise comments upon its doctrines; which, considering the variety of our habits, apprehensions, studies, and education, perhaps no ten men in the kingdom could be supposed to understand precisely in the same identical acceptance.” Now that no ten men think exactly alike on all the subjects of these articles is very probable; and therefore I think that there may not be ten men in the kingdom who, after due consideration, can *bona fide* subscribe them; but it will be easy to find hundreds who shall have the same idea of their meaning.

That the legislature for the time being had any idea of their language being differently explained, so as to admit that *latitude of interpretation* which you want, and for which you contend; and especially that they had any idea of a greater latitude of interpreting the articles of *doctrine*, than those of *discipline*, is a mere chimera of your own, unsupported by any evidence, or probability. Of the two, more stress is evidently laid, as it ought to be, on matters of *doctrine*, than on those of *discipline*; and for any thing that appears, the latitude of interpretation was designed to be the same with respect to both; that is, *none at all*. They were, no doubt, meant to be *believed* and *conformed to*, as the plain sense of their words imports. This, indeed, you do not, in fact, deny; if, as you say, “all are excluded from your church who are excepted by the very letter of the articles;” and these articles are so many, so complex, and so definitely expressed, that your

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latitude



latitude of interpretation, if it be not sophistical and evasive, will amount to nothing.

Farther, you say \*, "Mr. Paley has thrown some light upon this much controverted subject; that you have considered his arguments at leisure, and that they have strengthened you in your opinion, that, in the present state of society, some establishment or other is absolutely requisite." I may therefore fairly presume that at one time you approved of the principle on which *he* defends subscription; and it is well known that he does not think that a belief of all the articles, in their literal sense, even with a latitude of interpretation, is necessary. And for this he is justly reprehended by Mr. Gisborne †.

This variety, and inconsistency, in your ideas of subscription, shew that you have fluctuated very

\* *Defence*, p. 46.

† "The opinion which Mr. Paley maintains," he says, p. 128, "appears to me not only unsupported by argument, but likely to be productive of consequences highly pernicious."—"That subscription may be justified without an actual belief of each of the articles, as I understand Mr. Paley to intimate, is a gratuitous assumption. On this point let the articles speak for themselves. Why is an article continued in its place, if it be not meant to be *believed*. If *one* may be signed without being believed, why may not *all*? By what criterion are we to distinguish those which may be subscribed by a person who thinks them false, from those which may not? Is not the present mode of subscription virtually the same as if each article were separately offered to the subscriber? And in that case could any man be justified in subscribing one which he disbelieved?"

"No circumstance," he adds, "could have a more direct tendency to ensnare the consciences of the clergy; no circumstance could afford

"the



much in your views of it; and I can truly feel for the anxiety you must have suffered on this account. And as the same views will probably occur again at different times, you will be subject to the same uneasiness again and again, while your power of reflection continues. I therefore think that, with your sensibility of mind, you would have chosen a much wiser part, if you had not subscribed at all, and have sacrificed all the boasted, but imaginary, advantages of an establishment, for that *liberty*, and *peace of mind*, which is enjoyed by us Dissenters; who are not bound by any subscriptions, but who are at liberty to follow evidence wherever it leads us, and who can change our opinions as often as we see cause so to do.

I shall close these remarks with some pertinent, though you, Sir, will think them severe, observations, of Mr. Clarke on your idea of subscription to the articles *in their literal and grammatical acceptation*, but with a *latitude in the interpretation of them*. "It is in fact," he says, p. 114, "as much as to say, "That he must believe the words as they stand in "their literal and grammatical acceptation, but he "may, by a mental reservation, save himself from "subscribing to the common and general meaning

"the enemies of the established church a more advantageous occasion of "charging her ministers with insincerity, than the admission of the "opinion, that the articles may safely be subscribed without a conviction of their truth, taken severally, as well as collectively. That "opinion I have seen maintained in publications of inferior note, but "I could not, without particular surprize and concern, behold it "avowed by a writer of such authority as Mr. Paley."

"of those words; or more briefly, that he must  
"believe the words exactly as they stand, but he  
"need not believe what is the obvious meaning of  
"them."

On this, and on your laboured explanations of  
the doctrine of the trinity, he goes on to say, "By  
"this the reader will see how true it is that wise  
"men can reason themselves out of their under-  
"standings, and how, by a sort of metaphysical  
"legerdemain, that which in the nature of things  
"is *impossible*, becomes in a moment not only  
"possible, but so *plain* and *familiar* to our appre-  
"hensions, that it is matter of wonder that all  
"the world does not see its absolute *beauty* and  
"*consistency*."

I am, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER IV.

*Of the State of Things among the Dissenters, and the Difference between the Churches of Rome and England.*

REVEREND SIR,

**H**AD you consulted with any of *us Dissenters*, as you did with *a person of eminence in the establishment*, you would have been better informed than you have been about the state of things among us, and could never have said, as you do\*, that "the Dissenters themselves in this country, who so much object to several of the ceremonies which our church has either appointed, or retained from ancient times, prescribe the posture of sitting in the celebration of the eucharist, and the joining of hands in that of matrimony, with several other observances and rites, which have no foundation in scripture, and which are as essential to their religion, as any thing that we observe is to ours."

Now, Sir, no part of all this is true. In one of our meetings, where I attended six years, a very

\* *Defence*, p. 96.

conscientious woman always chose to receive the Lord's supper kneeling, and it gave no offence to any body; and were we at liberty to celebrate marriage, I am confident we should not in general, if at all, adopt the ceremony of *joining hands*. As to the several other observances and rites, which you do not mention, I can say nothing about them, but I know of none to which your objection can apply.

Your other objections to our situation are equally void of foundation. "Among the Dissenters of  
"our own country," you say\*, "the want of some  
"legal provision for the clergy, as well as of some  
"kind of *test*, seems to be attended with a variety  
"of inconveniences. I have been credibly in-  
"formed that notwithstanding they seem so free  
"from every species of controul, yet orthodoxy is  
"as much talked of in the several subdivisions of  
"their society as it is among the divines of the  
"national church, and that even the most illiterate  
"person, of either sex, who contributes his half-  
"crown to the maintenance of the minister, thinks  
"himself intitled to make inquiry into the soundness  
"of the doctrines which he teaches. A few indi-  
"viduals, indeed, of that denomination refuse to be  
"under any kind of restraint in this respect, and in  
"pursuit of what they deem the *truth*, are little  
"solicitous even about those opinions which have

\* *Defence*, p. 46.



"in every age been esteemed most sacred by the  
"general voice of mankind. But these I have  
"also found to be greatly blamed by the dissent-  
"ing society at large, however justifiable they  
"may appear in the eyes of their own peculiar  
"flock."

Now, Sir, what is this but a picture of the state of christianity for the three first centuries; and to ridicule or censure this, is to censure the conduct of Divine Providence, which ordained that christianity should extend itself, and triumph over heathenism, in those very circumstances, and without the aid of civil power, which is necessary to form such an establishment as you admire. This civil power, the boasted *ally* of your church, has indeed done something for *the clergy*, by rendering them independent of their congregations; but it has done nothing for *the church*, besides corrupting and enslaving it. And what does your boasted independence on your congregations but lessen the motives for that regularity of conduct which is the greatest ornament of the clerical character, and on which alone you ought to depend for your recommendation. No man, I may say, has suffered more from the circumstance of being dependent on a congregation (though at present no person feels it less) than I myself have done; and no doubt there is a real inconvenience attending it. But I am satisfied that, upon the whole, it is a situation infinitely better than a state of independence; and a man whose

conduct is such as will approve itself to the reasonable part of mankind would disdain the advantage which a state of independence would give him.

Whatever is given to *the clergy* by the civil power is first taken from the *people*, who by this means are deprived of the minister of their own choice, and have nothing to do in proportioning his salary to his services; privileges which you cannot deny that the christian laity were possessed of even till long after the accession of Constantine. In fact, the civil establishment of christianity has been nothing but the subjugation of the laity to the power of the priests, from which it is hoped that in time they will have the good sense and the spirit to emancipate themselves.

We Dissenters are not countenanced by civil power. We have no support from the state. But neither had the apostles, nor the christian clergy for more than three hundred years; and with this apostolical and primitive condition we are content. The countenance of civil power has evidently this inauspicious circumstance, that it lays an undue bias upon the mind, a bias from which your own mind, Sir, is evidently not exempt. Your situation may be more reputable in the eyes of a vain world, and it is certainly more lucrative than ours; but we do not look for that *honour which comes from men*, and our reward is independent of acts of parliament.

With

With respect to the two churches of Rome and England you justly observe\*, "The whole dispute relative to our separation from the Roman church must then be reduced to this simple question: Which of the two churches had truth on its side, and taught the genuine doctrines of christianity. All other objections against our separation are illusions, and this is the only point to be determined."

On this principle, Sir, if we find errors in *your* creed, we are justified in our dissent from your church, as much as you are in dissenting from the church of Rome; and by this we are willing to abide. You write exactly like a Dissenter, when you say†, "Men will assume the privilege of thinking for themselves, when any difficulties occur, in spite of all professions of implicit faith; and that no christian will be persuaded, in compliment to any human authority, to embrace any tenet which he thinks evidently opposite to the written word of God. However far he may deviate from the general opinion of others, he knows that he must stand or fall to that judge alone, who alone can witness the sincerity of his researches, and the purity of his obedience. Nor is this any more an argument against the sober use of reason than it was an argument against the doctrines of the Messiah, that they were impugned by thousands. Subscriptions, tests, and creeds, might

\* *Defence*, p. 41.

† *Defence*, p. 51.

"indeed



“indeed have restrained his language in a land of  
 “religious intolerance, but they can never stifle  
 “conviction, or secure an unfeigned assent.”

“This, Sir, is the great principle of our dissent,  
 and we cannot express it better than you have done.  
 You would certainly, therefore, have acted more  
*consistently* if when you had left the church of Rome,  
 you had declined joining a church of *a similar kind*,  
 and attended with similar difficulties, though with  
 similar emoluments; and either have joined us, or  
 have formed a society of your own. For no real  
 inconvenience arises from such varieties as these.

You strain hard\* to make out “an essential  
 “difference between the churches of Rome and of  
 “England;” but still too many points of resem-  
 blance remain. You describe the church of Rome  
 as, “requiring the unfeigned assent of all her subjects  
 “without distinction; pronouncing a general ana-  
 “thema against all who reject or even controvert  
 “her decisions, comments, and explanations; ad-  
 “mitting in many essential points no latitude at all  
 “either of opinion, or of conduct; and interesting  
 “the civil power in her cause, so as to enforce all  
 “her spiritual censures with the infliction of tem-  
 “poral punishments. Between that church,” you  
 say, “and ours no kind of comparison can be  
 “equitably drawn.”

\* Address, p. 44.

Now,



Now, Sir, we see an evident agreement between them in these very things. ' What anathema in the church of Rome is stronger than that in the Athanasian creed, which you retain from the church of Rome? Is not the whole of the hierarchy supported by temporal power, and are not your excommunications attended with civil disabilities? Let those who have been harrassed by your spiritual courts say how this case stands. I fear, Sir, that as yet you are as little acquainted with that church of which you are lately become a member, as you are with the Dissenters; and that in passing from the church of Rome to the church of England, though you might not, to adopt a coarse proverb, have leaped out of the frying-pan into the fire, you have only leaped out of the fire into the frying-pan.

You say, indeed\*, that "there still exist in our code of laws some similar penal restraints; nor have I any where attempted to defend them; but the present controversy," you add, "has shewn how obsolete they are, and how totally disregarded." But, Sir, your subscription declared your approbation of *the whole system*, on the idea of its being carried into execution; and therefore you subscribed what you now profess that you cannot defend. What the temper of the times allows us, we do not thank your church for; and the question between us is not what the church thinks proper to do in

\* Address, p. 44.

her present circumstances, which may be very different from what she *wishes* to do, but what is the *power* that she claims; and this, as a member of the church, you are bound to approve.

I am, &c.

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## LETTER V.

*Of the Difficulties attending the Subject of Subscription to Articles of Faith.*

REVEREND SIR,

**Y**OU say of this business of subscription\*, that "it is generally talked of, and yet little understood by many who are most severe in passing their censures upon it;" meaning no doubt myself. But, Sir, whether is it you, or I, who may be supposed, by an impartial judge, to have the strongest bias upon our minds to mislead our judgments; you, who get a comfortable, and as you think a reputable, establishment by means of

\* *Defence*, p. 211.

subscription

subscription, or I who am excluded from those advantages by means of it? If there be any real difficulty in this subject of subscription, your writings have not contributed to clear it up; nor will your conduct recommend it.

In fact, nothing can be plainer in its own nature. If you really *believe* the articles that are proposed to you, you certainly may subscribe them with a good conscience. If not, you ought to forbear, on the same principle on which an honest man would refuse to take a false oath in a court of judicature. There would have been no difficulty at all in this business, if it had not been perplexed by the sophistry of those whose interest prompted them to subscribe while their consciences should have withheld them. Hence it is that we have been amused with so many different and strange *principles of subscribing*.

No man, I will venture to say, who really believes the articles, in the obvious sense of them, would ever have thought of any other principle of subscription than that of his real belief of them. Nor, in fact, was any other idea suggested, till after it was well known that some of the clergy held opinions inconsistent with these articles. But having subscribed, and being unwilling to renounce the fruits of their subscription, they were driven to other modes of defending their conduct.

It would be much more consistent, and even reputable, to say at once, with a dissenting minister  
of

of whom I had some little knowledge (who not being so well received among the Dissenters as his vanity led him to expect, conformed to the church of England) that you have done one bad and unjustifiable thing, in order to have it in your power to do many good ones. This, at least, would be like a man who, by theft or robbery, should make himself master of a round sum of money, of which he should afterwards make an honest and reputable use. Whereas your conduct is that of the man who should get the money by the same unlawful means, and then pretend that he came honestly by it.

You describe yourself as perfectly *easy* with respect to what you have done; saying\*, "I have not hitherto seen any reason to apprehend that I shall ever regret the step I have taken;" but considering the wretched and contradictory apologies that you have made for it, I really cannot believe you. I am willing to think better of you than to suppose that you are wholly free from compunction; and your declarations to the contrary only remind me of what passed when I was a schoolboy; when, going to bathe in a river, those who had the courage to jump into the water first, and were asked if it was warm, would, in order to induce their companions to follow them, say, "O yes, it is very, very warm;" when it was evident by their very articulation that they could hardly speak for *cold*. Now, Sir, I pay less regard to your verbal decla-

\* *Defence*, p. 211.



ration in judging of your real feelings, than to your embarrassed method of making it.

On this subject of *subscription* and *establishments*, I would take the liberty to recommend to your particular attention our friend Mr. Berington's late tract on *the Rights of Dissenters*. It will instruct *you*, and the *age* in which it is written. By such writings as these the Catholics, becoming truly what their name imports, will no longer lie under the odium that their intolerance in former times has intailed upon the character (though in fact an intolerance of which all Protestant churches that have had *power* have sufficiently shared with them) and will teach us that liberality and moderation which many of us have yet to learn.

You, Sir, in particular may learn from this treatise the important doctrine of the independence of the true *church of Christ* on any *civil power* in the world, and to be more proud of being frowned upon, than of being favoured by, any state, flattered as you are with the honours and emoluments it has to bestow. It will shew you that what you are now so proud of are your *chains*, though made of gold, whether at present you feel the weight of them, or not.

Should his vigorous mind emancipate itself entirely, as it has already in part, from its present subjection to *church authority* (by which, however, the greatest men in all ages have been unfortunately enslaved)

enslaved) and he should find himself at liberty to range at large, under the conduct of *reason* alone, he will not, I am persuaded, *do things*, as you have done, *by halves*. He will not be diverted from the glorious pursuit of *truth* by any *golden apples* that may be thrown in his way, or exchange one set of chains for another, fancying that he has no choice but of those which suit him best.

I am, &c.

## LETTER VI.

*Of the Doctrine of the Trinity, and particularly of Distinctions in the Godhead.*

REVEREND SIR,

AS you do not profess to controvert what I have undertaken to defend with respect to the doctrine of the trinity; but content yourself with an authoritative *ipse dixit* on the subject, I have no occasion to consider what you have advanced in favour of it, either from *metaphysical considerations* or from the *scriptures*, especially after that most clear and masterly reply which Mr. Clarke has made to your *Address*, as far as those articles are concerned.

I shall

I shall therefore do little more than shew your inconsistency with yourself in subscribing to such a doctrine, as an example to young and incautious men; and to apprise them of the fatal snares into which they may be drawn by such subscriptions. For it will appear that you must have put great force upon your mind in attempting to reconcile your subscription with reason and scripture.

As a maxim on which to set out in the discussion of this subject, and in which I intirely agree with you, you say\*, that "a thing may be said to be *contrary to reason*, which contradicts some other proposition, which is either self-evident, or which can be undeniably proved from one that really is so." You also disclaim†, "a blind implicit faith which has no proper object to which our ideas can be attached." You then assert‡, that "every single part of the Athanasian creed is strictly and logically true, though not perhaps expressed in the most unexceptionable words." Let us now see how you explain the parts of this logical creed on such rational principles.

You say§, that "there is a real distinction in the Godhead, whatever the nature of this distinction be;" and||, that "these distinctions have been made known to us under the idea and appellation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." That there may

\* Address, p. 27.

† Address, p. 7.

‡ Address, p. 41.

§ Address, p. 6.

|| Address, p. 4.

be something in the divine nature that may be denominated by the term *distinction* (whether it be *one distinction*, or *three distinctions*; for you use both the expressions) cannot be denied, because it is a subject concerning which we know nothing at all. But that *revelation evidently points it out* to us is surely saying too much; when no mention is made in revelation of any *distinction in the divine nature* at all, and when this is a mere hypothesis of your own, to explain other propositions, which also are not to be found in the scriptures.

However, let us proceed as well as we can with your account of this *threefold distinction in the Divine Being*, so necessary to your system, and compare your idea of it with that which is laid down in the Athanasian creed, all the parts of which you say are strictly and logically true. You disclaim, indeed\*, being able “to give any complete illustration of “this abstruse matter;” but let us see what you produce, as offering† “some faint resemblance of “the trinity.” For a faint light is better than absolute darkness.

You say‡, that “the three persons do not make “three Gods, any more than the King of England, “George the Third, and the Elector of Hanover, “are three men, though each of them separately “taken may be affirmed to be a man.” To make a distinction in the Divine Being corresponding to this

\* Address, p. 11.

† Address, p. 10.

‡ Address, p. 10.



idea would be saying that God is *a self-existent being*, the *maker of the world*, and the *God of the Jews*. But this amounts to no such distinction in his *being*, or *nature*, as your hypothesis requires. For they are only different *characters* of the same undivided person. As yet, therefore, we are as much in the dark as ever with respect to *a trinity in the divine nature*.

Your next illustration\* is that of "the *will*, the *memory*, and the *understanding*, as three really distinct powers in the human soul." But this is an illustration of a very different kind from the former, and can never apply to the same case; so that if this be true, the other is false. For none of these distinctions can be predicated of the whole undivided soul, as the former are of the whole undivided Godhead; since you would not say that either the will, the memory, or the understanding, was a *complete soul*; as you affirm the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be each of them *completely God*.

Still more unhappy is your comparison of this threefold distinction in the Divine Nature to the *three branches of a tree*, "each of which," you say†, "has every requisite to form a complete plant." On this idea the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are indeed each of them God, but then they are distinct parts of *another God*, which comprehends them all; so that in reality you make *four Gods*, the tree being

\* Address, p. 10.

† Address, p. 11.

a plant, and each of the three branches another distinct plant; for the stem of the larger plant, out of which the three smaller ones issue, cannot be comprehended in any of the three. This method of making distinctions in the Deity was perhaps suggested to you by the litany, in which you solemnly invoke first the *Father*, then the *Son*, then the *Holy Ghost*, and lastly the *trinity*. Here indeed is your *tree*, with its *three branches*.

I wonder still more at your comparison of the trinity to a *polype*\*, "which," you say, "may be divided into various parts, each of which becomes a perfect animal;" because these parts are not perfect animals till they are intirely *separated* from each other, and therefore cannot be said to *be*, or to *constitute*, but only to *have been*, and to *have constituted*, one polype. On this idea there was a time when the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost had no separate existence, but were united in one divine nature, which could only be said to contain the elements out of which they were afterwards formed. If there be any thing, Sir, in this exhibition that exposes your *plain and obvious doctrine* of the trinity to ridicule, do not say that *I* suggested it.

Certainly, then, there is nothing in any of these comparisons that throws the least light on the curious propositions of the Athanasian creed; viz. that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are

\* Address, p. 11.

each of them God, "none of them before or after  
 "the other; none greater or less than the other,  
 "and yet not three Gods, but one God."

You absolutely disclaim\* "the use of the term  
 "*person* when applied to *God*, as having the same  
 "meaning, and drawing after it the same conse-  
 "quences, as when applied to *men*; because then,  
 "as three persons make three men, the three per-  
 "sons in the Godhead would make three Gods."  
 To what idea, then, does the word *person* corre-  
 spond, when it is predicated of these distinctions in  
 the divine nature? For without some *ideas* you  
 must agree with me, that no *proposition*, nothing  
 concerning which any thing can be affirmed or  
 denied, can be framed.

You do not tell us what this idea is in itself, but  
 only between what two other ideas it is to be found.  
 For you say †, it "is not a mere *relation*, *mode*, or  
 "*conception*; but something between this, and the  
 "idea annexed to the word *person* as applied to  
 "men." But still, if you do not fix the distance  
 of this idea from each of the two extremes, between  
 which it is situated, we have nothing *determinate*,  
 and therefore still nothing concerning which any  
 thing can with certainty be affirmed or denied.

Besides, there are ideas between which there can  
 be no proper medium, and such are ideas which have

\* Address, p. 10.

† Address, p. 11.



no relation to each other, as these of *mode* and *person*, between which your *nondescript* idea lies. Would it not be ridiculous, for example, to talk of an intermediate idea between *tall*, or *short*, which are *modes*, and *the man Mr. Hawkins*, who is a *person*, and to form propositions concerning this intermediate idea.

Such ideas as these cannot be *shaded off* into one another, like two different colours. They admit of no comparison, and have nothing at all of an *intermediate nature* between them. So that the thing you so earnestly contend for, is an absolute *nonentity*. You may just as well make propositions concerning something between the *smell* of an apple, and the *sound* of a drum, or between the *colour* scarlet in a cardinal's hat, and the *figure* of a lawn sleeve on the arm of an English prelate, that may happen to come across your imagination, as concerning any thing between a *mode*, and a *person*. Archimedes asked for something to stand upon when he proposed to move the earth; but you, Sir, proposing to effect still greater things, require nothing at all to stand upon.

Still, then, we are totally without ideas concerning this *threefold distinction in the divine nature*, and are therefore unauthorized to affirm any thing about it. It is a mere business of *Abracadabra*, or to use your own term\*, *Bliettri*; as if you had said, the Father is *Bliettri*, the Son *Bliettri*, and the Holy

\* Address, p. 7.



Ghost *Blieſtri*, and theſe three *Blieſtri's* make one God. Nay, ſince you deny the uſe of the word *perſon*, or of any other term in the whole compaſs of language, to which any ideas have ever been annexed, we have neither *ideas* nor *words* for this curious diſtinction. So that it is no better than ſaying the Father is — the Son is — and the Holy Ghofit is — and that theſe three — are one God, with this additional abſurdity, that the term *God*, which denotes all the three, is, in its intire ſenſe, applicable to each of the three.

Surely, Sir, there is nothing in the ſcriptures, which were written for the uſe of plain perſons, that requires this ſtrange logic to make it intelligible. In what does this differ from “a blind implicit “faith which holds out no proper object to which “our ideas can be attached,” which you \* diſclaim? It is preciſely that very thing.

You ſay †, that “we have a general idea annexed “to the word *diſtinction*,” but I have examined all your illustrations of this general idea, and have ſhewn that they do not in the leaſt degree apply to the caſe, and therefore we are left wholly *without ideas*, general, or particular. Conſequently when you ſpeak ‡ “of the ſoul and body of Jeſus being “aſſumed from the firſt moment of his exiſtence, “into an intimate union with one of theſe relations

\* Addreſs, p. 7.

† Addreſs, p. 7.

‡ Addreſs, p. 14.

“or distinctions in the divine nature,” it is in effect to talk of an intimate union with *nothing at all*.

The phrase of *a distinction in the divine nature* seems to be growing fashionable with the orthodox divines of the present day; though for no reason that I can imagine, but because, suggesting no ideas at all, it seems to be less open to confutation. It may also seem to preserve the idea of the *divine unity* something better than the term *persons*, of which the trinity has been generally said to consist.

According to some, this *distinction* in the divine nature so little affects the *unity* of it, that it is held to be only a temporary thing. For, as I am informed, Dr. Hinchliffe the bishop of Peterborough, in a Charge which he lately delivered at Daventry, thinking proper to give his clergy his own ideas of a doctrine which is now the subject of public discussion, said that, in his opinion, “when the time shall come in which *the Son shall give up the kingdom to the Father*, so that *God shall be all in all*, the threefold distinction which at present subsists in the divine nature shall be no more.”

This, I shall observe, was very nearly the opinion of the ancient Sabellians, or philosophical Unitarians; who supposed that a kind of *divine ray*, issuing from the Father, the sole fountain of divinity, was attached to the person of Jesus, but only from the time of his baptism; and that when he ceased

to

to appear upon earth, and to work miracles (to which this communicated divinity was necessary) it was withdrawn. If a distinction in the divine nature be any thing more than this, it must imply such a *change* in the Divine Being as must be incompatible with divinity. Whatever has an *end*, had, no doubt, a *beginning* also; and since this wonderful change in the divine nature, from being simply *one*, without this mysterious *distinction*, to this *threefold distinction*, called *the trinity*, was occasioned by the circumstances of this earth of ours, viz. the fall of our first parents, it may not be impossible but that similar distinctions in the divine nature may take place in consequence of particular events in other habitable worlds; and though a *threefold* distinction has been sufficient for our purposes, the different circumstances of other worlds may require different arrangements of the same kind, and thus the divine nature will be a perfect Proteus.

If I have been misinformed, and in consequence of this have misrepresented his Lordship's opinion, it will be in his power to set me and the public right about it. But if this representation be just, and such doctrines pass without censure in the church of England, I shall conclude that the doors of this church are open to *all opinions*, however discordant; and that the heads of it are perfectly indifferent to every thing but the hierarchy, and the emoluments of it. It will be thought that any member of the church may profess what he pleases, and if he make no farther disturbance, he will not be  
be



be disturbed. It may even be thought that I myself, an Unitarian, a Necessarian, and a Materialist, as I professedly am; if I could but satisfy myself in getting through the door of *subscription*, no question would be asked, no recantation required, and I should be permitted to write as I now do, publicly arraigning the doctrine of the trinity, or any other doctrine of the church that I should see reason to call in question. For except in *degree*, there is no difference between my conduct and that of his Lordship's; as we both agree in avowing opinions intirely opposite to those of the church.

You will find some excellent observations on this doctrine of *distinctions in the Deity* in Mr. Clarke, who particularly observes, p. 116, that if, as you say, these distinctions have each of them their different *attributes* and *properties*, they must be different *persons*, in the proper sense of the word, which is the same thing as different *beings*, and then you make *three Gods*. These distinctions, therefore, in the Deity are either absolutely nothing at all, or else substantial divine persons, or Gods. For as he observes, p. 119, "if they are not strictly and properly personal distinctions, then I contend that they are no distinctions at all to the purpose of the trinity, and into this vortex must Mr. Hawkins's distinction of *properties* from the *persons* in which those properties inhere, ultimately fall."

After I had written the above, a judicious friend recommended to my notice what had been advanced  
on



on this subject of *distinctions in the divine nature* by the author of the *Notes to the Life of Dr. Watts* by Dr. Johnson; and it appears to me to be so much to the purpose, that I shall copy the principal part of it.

“ I can form no idea of a *threefold distinction in Deity*, but that of *three beings*, or *three component parts*, which is equally inconsistent with the *unity*, and would imply *divisibility*. I can easily conceive of a distinction between the *attributes* of God; but are the Son and Spirit only distinct attributes? If so, with what propriety can they be represented, and addressed, as *persons*; and how can they sustain different *offices*, and perform different *works*, or indeed any at all. Besides, if the attributes of God be allowed to be personified, it will follow that there are as many persons in God as there are attributes. If the *wisdom* of God be called one person, and his *power* another, his *holiness* may as justly be stiled a third, his *goodness* a fourth, &c. The attributes of Deity are only the properties of his nature. Neither of these can be properly called God, or be spoken of as *equal to God*, who is the being to whom they all belong. Moreover, God himself you must allow to be a *being*, and God the Father, you will admit, is a *person* in the proper sense of that term, i. e. an *intelligent being*: But if the Son and Spirit are only attributes of God, then they are not equal to him, and consequently this notion is contrary to the orthodox faith. If you mean  
“ that

“that the one God sustains *three characters*, or  
 “*relations*, this is intelligible enough; but then it  
 “is not orthodox. It is pure Sabellianism. Besides,  
 “God sustains more characters and relations than  
 “*three*. Consequently, according to this scheme,  
 “there are more distinctions, or persons.”

If the ingenious author had examined with the same freedom what seems to be his own idea (as he has shewn it to be that of Dr. Watts, and of Dr. Doddridge) of the *union of God with the man Christ Jesus*, it would have appeared as untenable a mode of maintaining the doctrine of a trinity, as this of a *distinction in the Godhead*. What proper *union* can there be between God and a creature? It cannot be a *necessary* union, because it had a beginning, and therefore may cease to be. How, then, is any idea that we can form of such an *union* at all different from that which we annex to the term *presence with*; as when we say that God was present with Moses, or any other prophet? And if there be no difference in our *ideas*, there ought not to be any in our *words*, if we do not mean to deceive.

On this principle of Christ having no other divinity than that which is derived from the union of the Father with him, it ought never to be said that *the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are each of them God*, because this phrase conveys to the hearer the idea of *independent divinity*, whether originally derived from one source, viz. the divinity of the Father, or not. Because in fact there is not,  
 upon

upon this scheme, any other divinity than that of the Father; and the Son, and Holy Ghost, as distinguished from the Father (which is necessarily implied when they are mentioned along with him, as equally God) have no divinity at all.

Besides, our Saviour himself uses this term *union with God*, as what is equally applicable to his disciples, as to himself; and therefore we have no authority whatever to suppose any other kind of union. The idea, if it can be called an idea, is unscriptural, as well as unintelligible, and absurd.

I am far from charging such men as Dr. Watts and Dr. Doddridge with wilful prevarication in this business. But they certainly were not aware how much they were influenced by a dread of abandoning the doctrine of the trinity altogether; and therefore they acquiesced in a scheme which retained it merely in words, when the thing itself was really discarded. But this apology, which may be made for Dr. Watts and Dr. Doddridge, will not apply in the same degree to those who now defend the doctrine of the trinity on the same principles, because there has been time to reflect upon the subject; and so much has been written upon it, that it cannot but be understood by those who will give proper attention to it. Nothing, indeed, can be more evident than that God merely *dwelling* in a man (from which this has obtained the name of the *in-dwelling scheme*) cannot make that man to be God; any more than a demon, according to the doctrine of possession,



possession, dwelling in a man, can make him to be a demon. If it was possible that *two beings* of different natures should be united, so as to become *one*, it would not be either of the former beings, but a Being of a different nature, partaking of the properties of both. On this principle, therefore, of Christ being *united to God*, he would be a being of a different nature from God, viz. the exact medium between God and man; and this would be far from reaching our idea of Christ being God. It would be far short of the *perfection* which we ascribe to divinity. But in every view of it, the idea of Christ being God in consequence of his union with God, or of God dwelling in him, is most absurd. If Jesus Christ, or the soul of Jesus Christ, be supposed to have pre-existed, these advocates for the in-dwelling scheme ought to be denominated *Arians*; if not, Socinians, or Unitarians. And it is I fear the dread of these unpopular names, and the consequences of unpopularity, that is, more than they are aware of, the true reason of their disclaiming them.

After this digression I must return to the farther consideration of your ideas of the trinity. You well say \*, "It is the height of absurdity to affirm that we clearly perceive a contradiction between terms which we confessedly do not apprehend." But then it is equally absurd to say, that there is *no* contradiction between them, because there is a case in which we are unable to affirm or deny at all.

\* *Defence*, p. 67.

Again,



Again, you well say \*, "had God required these things to be more explicitly believed, he would have revealed them in a more explicit manner." I therefore conclude that no faith is required in this doctrine of the trinity, because nothing is revealed about it; and because nothing could have been understood, if it had been revealed in the language that you give us. God would never have tantalized men with the revelation of *words*, to which they could have affixed no ideas, and then make their eternal salvation depend (according to the doctrine of your Athanasian creed) upon their assenting to such unmeaning sounds.

After giving us this *darkness* where we expected *light*, it is curious enough to hear you say †, "it may well be questioned whether our ideas of *trinity, person, union, divinity of Christ, &c.* when stated in general terms, are not in fact full as luminous and distinct as those of *person, substance* or *essence*, when applied to the Father only—a spiritual being, without form, parts, limitation, or cause." For where is the difficulty of understanding what is meant by the term *person, substance*, or *essence* (and you might have added *Being*) as applied to the Father; when we only mean by any of these terms, as applied to him, the very same that we mean by them when they are applied to any thing else, viz. *that in which certain properties*

\* *Defence*, p. 71.

† *Address*, p. 9.

*inhere,*

*inhere*, or to which they belong? And you will not pretend to say that we have as clear an idea of this *threefold nature of God*, as we have of the simple nature of *man*, of a *tree*, or of a *stone*, the properties of which we can distinctly perceive, so that we can with the greatest certainty say that they are possessed of them.

Here we have only *one essence*, or *substance*, call it which you please, with *properties* belonging to it, whereas you say\*, that “these three distinctions in God, be they what they will, are intimately and inseparably united, so as to constitute one undivided essence, one and the same being.” Each of these distinctions, if it be any thing at all, must have its own *essence*, or *substance*, and yet it is necessary that these *three essences* or substances, should constitute no more than *one essence*, or substance. Do not pretend, Sir, that there are any difficulties in nature, of which you speak† (and by the consideration of which you hope so to humble our understandings, as that we shall admit of any absurdity you shall propose to us) comparable to such a contradiction as this. If, to your *arguments* you can even add *miracles*, the doctrine you propose could not be received. While a man retains the use of his senses, and requires *ideas* in order to make *propositions*, it is not possible that he should believe it.

\* Address, p. 49

† Address, p. 32.

I have

I have shewn that when you speak of three *distinctions in God* constituting only *one God*, you give us no ideas at all, and yet require a solemn and important affirmation. I shall now shew you that, when you do not sufficiently attend to this *threefold distinction in God*, you have an idea of *one God* inconsistent with every thing you say of the *three*.

You say\*, “We are ready to allow that, in an “abstract sense, the title of *God* is more emphatically “applied to the Father, than to the other two, “when he is considered as the fountain of the God- “head; and also that this appellation, when applied “to any one single person, has not the same exact “and adequate signification as when we ascribe it “to the three persons conjointly.” You also say†, “the Father has a pre-eminence and priority of “order, office, and causality.” Now what more could you say to describe the difference between *God* and a *creature* than to say that the former is the *cause* of the latter? Here, Sir, are clear ideas, but they are utterly discordant with what you subjoin to the former of these propositions‡, that “the idea “of *paternity*, and *unorigination*, gives the Father a “superiority, or rather a priority of order, which “yet is by no means incompatible either with the “notion of coexistence or perfect equality;” and also to what you subjoin to the latter of these propositions§, viz. that “he is in no sense superior, as

\* Address, p. 4.

† Address, p. 15.

‡ Address, p. 5.

§ Address, p. 15.

“to excellence, or duration.” The ideas are absolutely *contradictory*, and can never be predicated of the same things. For what can be more so, than that a thing *caused* should be equal to its *cause*?

You have nothing like this doctrine of the *superiority of the Father* in the Athanasian creed. There, all the three persons are represented as being possessed of all the properties of Godhead, which are distinctly enumerated; and it is declared that “none of them is afore or after, none of them greater or less than the other.” This creed, therefore, and your idea of the Father being the *cause* of the Son’s existence, can never be reconciled. On this idea of yours there is *one God*, from whom *Christ*, as well as all other things, derives his being; but according to the Athanasian creed, all the three persons are absolutely independent of each other, and none of them is either the cause of the other, or possessed of any kind of superiority. Whoever composed this creed, he would have disclaimed your idea of the *supremacy of the Father*, in any sense whatever.

I am, &c.

LETTER



## LETTER VII.

*A Comparison between the Doctrine of Transubstantiation and that of the Trinity; of the Damnatory Clause in the Athanasian Creed, and of some Arguments for the Doctrine of the Trinity from the Scriptures.*

REVEREND SIR,

YOU labour hard\*, with your *seven reasons*, but all to no purpose, to shew that the doctrine of the *trinity* rests on a better foundation than that of *transubstantiation*. But you say †, that “had Christ asserted even *this* in exprefs terms I “should certainly have thought myself bound to “believe it, notwithstanding all the arguments from “*reason*, which I now think so conclusive against “it.” In this you discover the remains of your former Catholic principle, of the submission of *reason* to *faith*. Now, of the two, the doctrine of *transubstantiation* is revealed in much plainer terms than that of the *trinity*. For it is said, in some sense or other, that the *bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ*; but it is no where said that there is a *threefold distinction in the divine nature*, in any

\* Address, p. 29.

† Defence, p. 74.

sense whatever. All the real difference between the doctrine of transubstantiation and that of the trinity is that the former implies a *physical impossibility*, since no two different substances can have the same properties; and the latter a *mathematical one*, since *three* cannot be *one*, or *one three*. It is not, as I have said, in the power of *miracles* to prove either; though it is in the power of *church authority*, and *church preferment*, to make men declare their unfeigned assent to both; and if to these, to any other propositions whatever.

Your natural candour startles at the *damnatory clause* in the Athanasian creed, and, like the bishop of St. David's, you take it to be a very innocent thing. But your explanation is wrapped up in more words than his. "With respect to the uncharitable clauses," which you say\*, "are usually set in so very unfair a light, it cannot be too strongly inculcated, that whatever the church declares concerning the terms of salvation relates only to the gospel covenant, and the ordinary course of God's dispensations, in the line of revealed religion, without pretending to exclude from the general mercies of our common Father, or the benefits of Christ's redemption, any such of his creatures as have not forfeited their claim to favour, by a wilful transgression of such laws as they had sufficient means to become acquainted with."

\* Address, p. 42.

You

Your meaning, Sir, in this language, as an apology for the Athanasian creed, is utterly impenetrable to me. I only know that according to this creed, if the language of it have any meaning, I, and all mankind, at least all who have heard of it (though this is an exception which the creed itself has not made) are to be *damned everlastingly* if we do not believe it, and that you, Sir, from mere good nature, seem desirous that we may not.

Among the texts of *scripture* by which you prove the divinity of Christ, there are some which I never heard of before. For example, you represent Christ as saying\*, "I am the Lord of hosts. I am the first and the last, besides whom there is no other God. I am the most high God, besides whom there is no Saviour. In piercing me they pierced the Lord their God. I am the mighty God, and everlasting Father. I, by my own power, remit the sins of men. I am the character of God's substance, &c. Whatever you ask in my name, I, who am God, will do it. Baptism without my name is as little valid as without the name of the Father." &c. &c. &c.

Now this, Sir, is altogether your own language, and not that of Christ. It is not scripture, but a miserable perversion of scripture, and implies nothing less than contradiction and blasphemy. For according to this, the Father himself is not God. Nay,

\* Address, p. 21.

if he had had no existence, there would have been no want of him. And when you talk of *the blood of God\**, and of *God incarnate dying†*, the language is so unscriptural, and so shocking, that I am struck with horror, and can proceed no farther. Surely, such uncouth and unscriptural language, which your unscriptural and irrational hypothesis obliges you to make use of, sufficiently exposes itself.

I am, &c.

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## LETTER VIII.

### *The Conclusion.*

REVEREND SIR,

**I**F, as I have said, you had not ingrossed all the words expressive of *wonder* and *astonishment* that the English language furnishes, I should have applied some of them on closing, as well as on entering upon, this review of your most extraordinary performance. That young men, who have not read or thought on the subject, and whom their parents and tutors have sufficient reason, of some

\* Address, p. 21.

† Address, p. 17.

kind



kind or other, not to lead to read or think about it, should subscribe the thirty-nine articles, or any thing else, is not surprizing. Nor is it much to be wondered at that a person should think he has sufficient reasons, of some kind or other, to quit the church of Rome, and to become a member of the church of England; because, in certain situations, and with respect to certain persons, the latter may have many things to recommend it, which he cannot have the former. But that a person, with a mind so enlightened as yours is, should undertake a defence of your conduct, and write upon the subject, and in so palpably weak a manner as you have done; that you should perhaps have deliberately *transcribed* what you had written, and then have carefully *corrected the press*; so that the same thoughts and language must have passed in review before you several times, and yet that you should not perceive the extreme futility of your reasoning, and how much you are exposing the cause which you would wish to recommend, may well excite wonder.

But as the term *wonder* is only expressive of *ignorance*, I will not say that *I wonder*; but only that I now see that there is something in the church of England, which has more power than I was aware of, to blind the eyes of men, in other respects honest and ingenuous; and to produce a degree of self-delusion almost equal to any thing that we see in Bedlam.

This consideration makes me truly thankful to God, that my situation and circumstances have been

different from yours. For I am far from thinking that either my *understanding*, or my *heart* is naturally better than yours. But what must we think of a *system* which has such a power of perverting the best faculties and dispositions that God has given to man!

Let all who are happily out of the influence of this *fascination* join in the most ardent prayers, and the most earnest, but peaceable endeavours, for the demolition of it. Like Ulysses, let us feel for the fate of our fellow men, who are so dreadfully metamorphosed by it; and labour to undo the charm which makes them think and feel so differently from what they naturally would do.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your very humble servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

## A P P E N D I X.

---

*Of the different Senses in which a Subscription to the thirty-nine Articles has been vindicated by Divines of the Church of England.*

**A**N ingenious friend of mine having taken the pains to collect an account of all the senses in which the subscription of the thirty-nine articles of the church of England has been vindicated, and as it may amuse my readers to see them, I shall subjoin them as an Appendix to these Letters. He has annexed the *authorities* for each; but as I hope he will himself make some publication on the subject, I shall omit them, and content myself with the bare list.

*The Articles have been subscribed*

I. In the sense of the imposers.

II. In the sense of the compilers.

III.

III. In their strict, obvious, and literal meaning.

IV. In any sense which the words will bear, consistently with the subscriber's interpretation of scripture.

V. As articles of peace.

VI. As true in general, and sufficiently so for their intention, though not true in every particular proposition.

VII. As far as they are agreeable to the word of God.

VIII. As far as they are fundamental articles of faith, necessary to salvation.

IX. On the authority of others.

X. In any sense which approved doctors of the church have affixed to them.

XI. As mere forms of admission into an office.

*To these I may add,*

XII. That of Mr. Paley, who maintains that any person may subscribe the articles who does not belong to any of the three classes of men originally intended to be excluded from the church by them, viz. *Papists, Puritans, and Anabaptists.*

XIII.



XIII. I have heard another sense of subscription maintained in conversation by two eminent Divines of the church of England, viz. that any person may subscribe the articles of the church whose faith is that of the members of the church, though it should be different from that which is expressed in the articles. N. B. They were both Arians on the principle of Dr. Clark, and supposed *that* to be the faith of the generality of the clergy.

XIV. Lastly, I was informed by an anonymous letter from Oxford, that many persons think themselves justified in subscribing the thirty-nine articles of the church of England, though they do not believe them, because it is well known to those who receive their subscriptions, that they do not, and therefore they say they deceive no body.

I do not in this place make any remarks on this, or any other of the articles above-mentioned. Many, and painful ones, must occur to any person of honour and reflection.

I shall conclude with observing that, if subscription to the thirty-nine articles be considered as a thing of any consequence, the heads of the church, or the legislature, should declare in what sense it is to be understood. For it is evident that, according to some of the above-mentioned senses, it amounts to no subscription at all. It has even been maintained in print, that what a clergyman says in the desk is not to be considered as his own words, but only those of the legislature, of which he is the mouth,

mouth, and which he is paid for pronouncing; and that he is at liberty to preach the very reverse of the doctrine of the Common Prayer-book in the pulpit. But if subscription be of *no use*, it certainly ought not to be required; as it only excludes scrupulous and conscientious men. If the church have any regard for the purity of its faith, something will be done in this very serious business.

Had all our bishops since the revolution been as intelligent and conscientious as the excellent Bishop Burnet, this grievance of *subscription to articles of faith* would not have remained unredressed. What he says on the subject in the *Conclusion of his History* is so much to my purpose, that I shall subjoin the whole paragraph.

“ The requiring subscriptions to the thirty-nine  
 “ articles is a great imposition. I believe them all  
 “ myself; but as those about original sin and pre-  
 “ destination might be expressed more unexcep-  
 “ tionably, so I think it is a better way to let such  
 “ matters continue to be still the standard of doc-  
 “ trine, with some few corrections, and to censure  
 “ those who teach any contrary tenets; than to  
 “ oblige all that serve in the church to subscribe  
 “ them. The greater part subscribe without ever  
 “ examining them; and others do it because they  
 “ must do it, though they can hardly satisfy their  
 “ consciences about some things in them. Churches  
 “ and societies are much better secured by *laws*,  
 “ than by *subscriptions*. It is a more reasonable, as  
 “ well as a more easy method of government.”

ADVERTISEMENT.

HAVING had occasion, in the course of these Letters, to recommend *Mr. Clarke's Tracts in Defence of the Divine Unity*, including his *Remarks on Mr. Hawkins's Letter to me*, I cannot conclude without mentioning two other publications, with which I wish to bring my readers acquainted, viz. *A Letter to the Rev. Dr. White, containing Remarks on certain Passages in the Notes subjoined to his Bampton Lectures, by Philalethes*, and *Mr. Capel Lofft's Observations on the first Part of Dr. Knowles's Testimonies from the Writers of the four first Centuries*.

I hope that Mr. Lofft will finish what he has begun, and continue his attention to a very important, and too much neglected, branch of learning.

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